John O'Brien • 2002 Appalachian Poetry Contest Winners • Silas House • Ray Hicks and the Doctors

NOW & THEN

THE A MAGAZINE

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First Person Appalachia

The Personal Essay Issue

Nancy Fischman

Love for Clouds

There was a time when a man said poems and friendship
grew visible. Whole
evenings, phrases came out of his mouth

like breasts. Language nourished with silence as an
infant opening for the
nipple: naked words appear and enter

the listeners. It is not strange and dreamlike. It
feels natural and fully
awake. *This* might seem strange, my standing

reading words on paper. I look up and speak and look
down. But I do not apologize.
Now is no less wonderful than then. We write

in a coffeehouse or parked alone in a car. We print
pages and revise on the
porch for months, years, tinkering. I am

climbing through a mist rising off the Tennessee River
in the 1940s, down a bluff.
No one knows I am. On the shale ledges

that slant and shelve into the water are stone seashells:
fossils from the ocean
that lived when fish spoke cloud shoals

in the bright milk-mind of this child.

— Coleman Barks

Born in 1937, Coleman Barks grew up in Chattanooga, Tenn., on the Tennessee River. He retired after 34 years of teaching American poetry and creative writing, mostly at the University of Georgia in Athens. Barks' most recent books include a new collection of translations of the poems of 13th-century Muslim poet Rumi, The Soul of Rumi *(HarperSanFrancisco), and a collection of his own poems,* Tentmaking *(Maypop).*

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"I will write it all down and pass it on
because that is who I am and what I am called to do."
—**Cathy Lentes**

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Craving Conversation

Dear Reader:
Because this is our personal essay issue, I'm going to take the opportunity to have a little heart-to-heart chat with you, the *Now & Then* reader.

A couple of weeks ago, we got a letter to the editor. Managing editor Nancy Fischman and I were so excited.

It was in response to "Devil's Train," the short story by Dave Payne Sr. that appeared in our spring issue. "Congratulations on another good product," the letter began. "I fear, however, that the author of 'Devil's Train' has his Hank and his Willie mixed up — unless maybe Willie plagiarized old Hank for 'Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain.'" Another *Now & Then* writer dropped by the office while on vacation to visit and took us to task, ever so gently, for not catching the fact that it should have been Willie Nelson, not Hank Williams, crooning "Love is like a dying ember / where only memories remain."

While "Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain" was certainly one of Willie Nelson's earliest hits and a signature song for him, it was in fact originally written in 1945 by Fred Rose, the legendary Nashville songwriter and partner with country musician Roy Acuff in the influential Acuff-Rose Publishing Co. The song has also been recorded by Acuff, Gene Autry, Anne Murray, Counting Crows, and Elvis Presley, among others — and by Hank Williams. (Dave Payne e-mailed us the song file to prove it.)

In 1950 and 1951, Williams was on a radio program, *Mother's Best Flour Hour,* heard on Nashville's WSM every morning at 7:15 a.m. The program, of course, was designed to inspire housewives to purchase Mother's Best Flour. Apparently, according to press reports, Williams' former bass player, Hillous Butrum, had 150 recordings from that show in his possession, including Williams singing "Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain." Butrum sold the recordings in 1997 to Legacy Entertainment Group, Inc., which planned to release them commercially. But Legacy has been blocked by a lawsuit filed by PolyGram Records, Inc., and by Williams' children, Hank Jr. and Jett.

As far as I know, the suit has not yet been settled. However, although Williams' version of the Fred Rose song has never been officially released, bootleg copies have cropped up on the web. And so, although the Webster in "Devil's Train" may not have come by the tape honestly, it is entirely possible that he'd be in possession of a tape of Williams singing "Blue Eyes Cryin' in the Rain."

As interesting as all this is, the larger point I'd like to call to your attention is just how excited we were when someone actually wrote to us about something that had appeared in the magazine.

We would love to receive more letters (or e-mails) to the editor. Every once in a blue moon, a reader writes to us — and we've published that letter on this page. But those responses are very few and far between. I've checked. The last ones we got came to us in time for the spring 1998 issue.

Occasionally we bump into people who say nice things about our work in general, and we do appreciate that. Even more occasionally, someone tells us that someone they know has told them that a third person was a bit miffed by something we had published. My response is always, "Great. Tell them to write a letter or send me an e-mail containing a thoughtful critique of the piece in question. Such a letter stands an excellent chance of being printed."

We don't expect our readers to agree with everything that appears in these pages. In part, what we are trying to do with *Now & Then* is to stimulate thought about complex issues and emerging trends of importance to Appalachia and, in the process, to reflect the region in all its diversity. It's our job as editors, we believe, to present arguments being advanced about issues in this region, arguments that help shape policy and affect people's lives, regardless (within reason) of the social or political philosophies they represent.

So we try to make sure, to the best of our short-staffed ability, that the facts writers are marshalling to support their positions are accurate and that those views are stated as clearly as possible. If a person's views are skewed more toward one side of an issue than another, we do our best to include another article in the same issue that represents the other side. And then we sit back, waiting for the conversation to begin.

If that conversation is taking place, we can't hear it. We'd love to be able to listen in, to learn from the airing of divergent points of view.

While I'm on the subject of our longing to get more feedback from our readers, I'd like to make a special request. Next spring, *Now & Then* begins its 20th year of publication. In honor of this milestone, we would like to solicit your thoughts on what this publication has meant to Appalachia, what it's managed to do — or hasn't managed to do — for the region. It's a good time for us to sit back and take stock — and we need your help.

We'd especially welcome concrete examples of how a particular piece had an impact on your thinking, changed your perceptions, moved you, or launched you on some course of action. We envision publishing excerpts from such letters or e-mails in some form, possibly on *Now & Then's* web page (cass.etsu.edu/n&t/) as a way of celebrating our anniversary.

Finally, of course, I'd like to invite you to sit back and read the work of all the very fine writers, whose essays, fiction, and poems fill this issue's pages.

— Jane Harris Woodside, Editor

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to: Editor, Now & Then, *ETSU, Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614-1707 or e-mail woodsidj@etsu.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity before publication.*

2002 Poetry

NOW & THEN APPALACHIAN POETRY COMPETITION

We're not entirely sure why, but *Now & Then's* 2002 Appalachian Poetry Competition attracted a record number of entries. In all, we received 388 poems from 182 poets residing in 23 states and Canada. Entries came to us from 12 out of 13 Appalachian states.

One of the reasons we attract high-quality entries is that, as one contestant commented, "you've always got good judges." This year was no exception. Our thanks to our final judge, Asheville, N.C., native **Michael McFee.** A distinguished associate professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, McFee has six collections of poetry to his credit, the most recent being last year's publication entitled *Earthly*.

Also, we'd like to express our gratitude to the four poets who served as screeners: **Cathy Lentes, G.C. Waldrep, James Owens,** and *Now & Then's* dedicated and discriminating poetry editor **Linda Parsons Marion.**

Finally, we want to recognize the people without whom this competition truly would not be possible. **The University of Virginia's College at Wise** and **East Tennessee State University's English department** have committed to permanent sponsorship of the second and third prizes, respectively. Our thanks as well to **Anonymous,** whoever he or she may be, for funding this year's first prize.

Keep writing poetry, Appalachia. Our next competition is scheduled for 2004.

—JHW

FIRST PRIZE — A. Jane Hicks

SPONSORED BY AN ANONYMOUS CONTRIBUTION

Jane Hicks' prize-winning poem, *"Felix culpa,"* is something of a departure for her. Hicks — who by day has "the best job in the world" teaching gifted elementary students in Sullivan County, Tenn. — has published in *Iron Mountain Review, The Sow's Ear, Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel, Wind,* and *Now & Then,* to name a few. But those, on the whole, have been lyric poems written in her own voice. *"Felix culpa,"* in contrast, is one of a series of narrative poems begun in the fall of 2000 and written in someone else's voice about a time other than the poet's own.

The speaker in *"Felix culpa"* is Cassandra — "and you can read all the connotations you wish into that," says Hicks. Cassandra is a woman living in the Southern Appalachian Mountains at the turn of the 20th century. Hicks had become intrigued with Alma, a character who first appeared in Kathryn Stripling Byer's 1992 collection, *Wildwood Flower.* Alma is an intelligent, intuitive, strong mountain woman, which led Hicks to wonder, "What would happen if there were an *educated,* intelligent woman living in the mountains? What would be her take on things?"

Over the years, Hicks has heard any number of fiction writers talk about characters who, they claim, have come to live with them. "I've heard them say that the characters take over, and I always thought people who said things like that were a little nuts — until I was so lucky to have such a character visit me. Now I understand entirely. Cassandra's given me all these stories."

Cassandra's own story begins with her mother, a woman from the big city who came to teach the children of the mountains. After marrying a local boy, the teacher adopted the Southern Appalachians as her home. Because she was educated herself, she naturally made sure her daughter was educated as well. When Cassandra's mother died in childbirth, she left behind a trunk of all the books the teacher had cherished. Among those volumes were the works of Milton.

"So I've been reading Milton because Cassandra's been reading him," Hicks reports. Both Cassandra's and Hicks' im-

This is a poem of terrific lyric energy, vivid and surprising (even shocking) throughout: The diction is marvelously fresh and the voice tough but sensitive. It also has a narrative dimension that keeps expanding. What begins as a single, fairly simple example of the "fortunate fall" expands in the last three stanzas to something much darker and more complex: the consequences of their loving, both in the child the speaker conceives and in the religious community where she lives. A really sharp and deep poem.

—Michael McFee

Felix culpa

Too wet to plow, we climbed
the ridge where Jack-in-the-pulpit
and fire pinks fringed woods' edge.

Spent of love, he lay crucified
across my Garden Path quilt, hat low
on his brow to shade the sun.

Stretched beside him, I thought his feet
the prettiest I ever saw on a man. Upright,
they framed the wet bottomland below.

Blue veins traced a mystery map
to his toes. I wiped them with the long towel
of my hair, woke him to adoration.

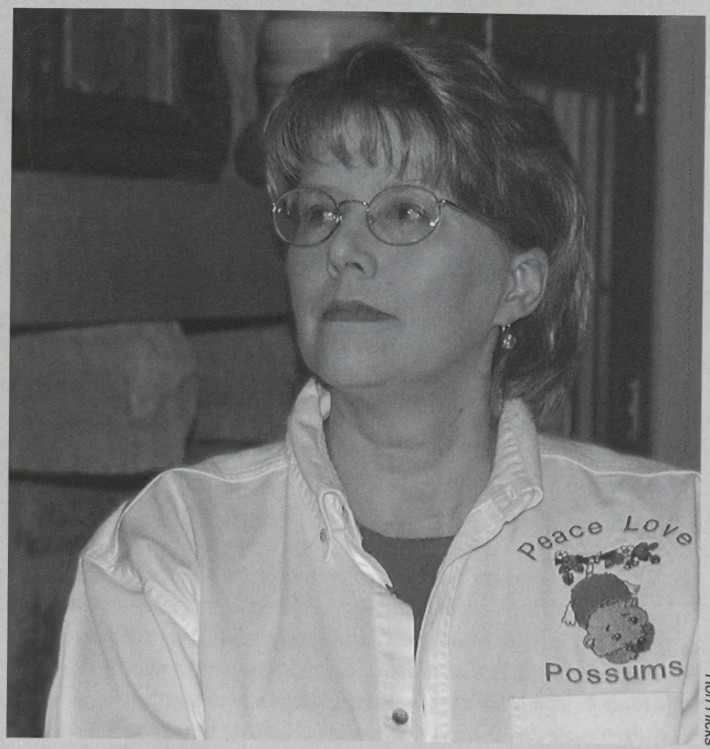
A cast of hawks rose on a draft
towing spring in their talons,
snaring us in a greening spiral.

I think of those elegant feet,
boot-shod, mud-logged, entrenched
below shell-plowed, fallow fields.

Summer fades, no word comes, I soon
harvest what he sowed before following war.
Tiny feet beat sad tattoos under my heart.

Preacher calls me Magdalene. I refute
him, knowing her wiser in her choosing,
blessed by loving, not damned.

—A. Jane Hicks



Ron Hicks

Jane Hicks

mersion in Milton, of course, explains how the poet came to title her work *"Felix culpa,"* or the "fortunate fall." The fortunate fall, a concept that is so important in Milton's epic, "Paradise Lost," refers to the paradox that if Adam and Eve had not sinned, God would not have had the opportunity to demonstrate his boundless love by sending his son to save mankind. In short, good can come out of evil.

Cassandra is a rebel, says Hicks, an outsider who is an insider. Because she has been raised and educated by a woman who came from elsewhere, Cassandra started out as a person who did not fit neatly into her mountain society. But then, her choice to engage in an illicit relationship made her even more of an outsider. "She knew what she was doing," observes Hicks. "The title of the poem tells you she had knowledge of good and evil. But she doesn't think she's beyond redemption either. She probably thinks there's worse people than her, even though that's not how society would see her."

And where does Cassandra go from there? "I'm not sure," laughs Hicks. "She hasn't told me yet.

"Cassandra is the community midwife. I do know that. So she knows all the secrets of the community. And I know that the baby she is carrying turns out to be a wonderfully educated daughter, Thalia." Hicks now has penned 20 poems that taken together describe the lives of Cassandra, her daughter, and a granddaughter, Lydia, whose voice, Hicks says, is closest to her own. It is Hicks' dream to publish the collection as a book one day.

Hicks was born in Greeneville, Tenn., but raised mostly in the Upper East Tennessee community of Kingsport, where her family moved when she was young after her father took a job at Tennessee Eastman Co. She attended Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va., before graduating with a double major in Spanish and education from Emory & Henry in Emory, Va. Eventually she earned a master's degree in counseling from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. Having raised three sons, she and her husband, Ron, now live in relative peace and quiet in Blountville, Tenn.

Throughout her life, she has written poetry. "I can't remember a time when I didn't write poetry," Hicks says. "I have things going back to the third grade." Although she has written some short fiction, writing verse is her first love. "Poetry comes more naturally to me. I like the idea — and I tell my students this — that poetry is a reader participation sport. It's like listening to a radio show. You have to use your imagination to fill in the blanks." In addition, writing poetry satisfies her curiosity about people. "You can put people in situations and think about what they might do and what they think about."

After a reign as the self-proclaimed queen of honorable mentions, she has had a winning streak going for the past two years. She took second place in 2001 in both the Betty Gabehart Prize competition, sponsored by the Kentucky Women Writers Conference, and in the Appalachian Writers Association's James Still Award for Poetry contest. In addition, she won third prize for poetry from the Tennessee Mountain Writers in 2002.

Of her newfound ability to create characters, she speculates that perhaps it comes from the fact that she has retained a child's ability to create imaginary friends. She admits that those imaginary friends must have some link to reality. "Is Cassandra a part of me? She probably is. But then I think often of some of the elderly women in my family who were just so phenomenally well-read and self-educated and so intelligent. I think she's maybe more them than me. But you know," she continues, "Cassandra, Thalia, and Lydia must surely be a part of me. They absolutely and surely must be, but in what way, I cannot tell you."

Whatever the origins of these characters, Hicks has found writing in their voices liberating. "It allows me to step back into another time and look at things as people might have at the turn of the last century. I think that the period after World War I was when things truly changed in the mountains. People had traveled in and out before then, most certainly, but I think that after so many people, men mostly, went to Europe during the war, communications started to open up. Thinking about change — how things have changed and how they are going to change — I think that's been the whole center for the work."

Hicks is an accomplished quilter as well as a poet. About three years ago — shortly before she began writing about Cassandra, Thalia, and Lydia — she began working on a quilt she had inherited from her grandmother, who had inherited it herself from Hicks' great-great-grandmother. "So I feel a real connection with this piece of fabric," says Hicks. "For the longest time, I could only write poems in this series when I was working on that quilt top." She has done her best to drag out work on this particular quilt as long as possible, but despite her best efforts, it's nearly done. "I'm hoping Cassandra doesn't stop visiting when I finally finish because when I have that piecework in my hands, that's when those poems flow out."

Does she have any explanation for that phenomenon?

"Oh," Hicks laughs, "I'll leave *that* a mystery."

— JHW

The University of Virginia's College at Wise

Second Prize

Jeff Mann

When Jeff Mann's paternal grandmother died in 1987, it was the first major loss of his life. "I just adored her," he says.

It wasn't until a decade after her death that he felt ready to deal with his grief through his poetry. "Sometimes in the writing of poetry, you can escape your feelings, while at other times, you just embed yourself in them deeper. And there are some feelings you're just not ready to feel."

When he was finally ready to risk feeling those painful feelings, "Goldenrod Seeds" was the result. "That poem is an attempt to remember my grandmother and to commemorate what she gave to me."

That impulse to commemorate is what powers much of Mann's work. "I have an almost obsessive sense of brevity and mortality," he explains. "I mean, it's not something that ruins my days, but that sense of time running out is one of those things that encourages me to try to appreciate what I can. Of course, part of why I write is that, like all the rest of us, I'm just trying to make sense of my emotional conflicts and confusions, but a lot of my writing has to do with attempts to commemorate, to try to hold onto things. Art seems to me to be a way to try to keep things as well as one can. I mean, it's kind of a paltry sort of possession, an attempt to possess that which cannot really be kept, you know."

He traces his heightened sense of the fragility of life simply to the fact that Perry Mann, his lawyer father, prodded him to read serious literature from an early age. "He has always been a very philosophical, educated person who encouraged me to read people like A.E. Housman, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Robert Frost. I read a lot of Frost my senior year of high school. And of course, a lot of serious literature is about mortality and loss, and so I suppose that's certainly a part of it. That, and the way my father urged me to look at the world from a perspective larger than just the day to day."

Born in Clifton Forge, Va., Mann and his family lived first in Covington, Va., and then finally, when he was 10 years old, moved to Hinton, W.Va. After graduating high school in 1977, he enrolled at West Virginia University (WVU) in Morgantown. During his last year there, the English major took a course in modern American poets, where he discovered Sylvia Plath. It proved to be a turning point.

"I had a fit over Sylvia Plath," he remembers. "I loved the way she used language, her imagery, and the starkness of her later poems. But mostly I loved her intensity. I've always been a sucker for that. I was a pretty dark person at the time — still am, I suppose. The despair, the anger: I had felt those things, and I hadn't really seen a poet who expressed them honestly." After graduating from WVU in 1981, he took a year off between undergraduate and graduate school. During that year, he read all

I love how this poem layers its elements in unrhymed couplets: the goldenrods and their seeds, the "you" being addressed and memorialized, the general observations about love and grief, men and women. It's intense and yet discursive at the same time, which is a difficult thing to pull off, and its quick shifts from topic to topic effectively mirror the unsettled emotional state of the speaker. And the poet has a fine ear: There are wonderfully rich sounds throughout.

— Michael McFee

Goldenrod Seeds

complete the decade beyond your death.
Stemmed flumes of river fog, pasture fog,

these gray gauntlets lining December's
mountain backroads, lining the family

graveyard's link fence. Feasts are what
I remember most, dinner tables where

good food was love made solid,
offered by those too shy or proud to speak it.

Buttermilk biscuits and country ham,
cobblers rich with blackberries

thicketing the dell below the cemetery.
I brought daisies, your favorite flowers,

to your deathbed, then tried
to forget what you said —

a dream in which you died,
and what woke you was not fear

of death but worrying
how afterwards I might survive.

No one knows which breath is last
until that breath is over,

as if silence defines
all that came before.

We men who are too stern,
we carry the weight of each refused tear

like stones. Our hearts are leather
bags slowly filling with river-smooth gems —

agate, smoky quartz, snowflake obsidian.
We own our griefs, will not let go,

for sorrow is solid, something to hold hard,
to stroke, remembering gifts given by those

we have lost. Grandmother, I brush
winter leaves from your marker, I puff

a seeding stalk of goldenrod out
along the wind. Its gray trails match

my breath, your breath rising, heat
from subsiding, shimmering sunlight.

Each seed a breath,
each breath a stream of stars.

— Jeff Mann

the Plath he could. "It was then I decided I wanted to be a poet, seriously wanted to be a poet." He returned to WVU to work on his master's degree in English; he did a creative writing thesis, with recently retired professor Winston Fuller as his advisor. Currently, he is an instructor in Virginia Tech's English department in Blacksburg.

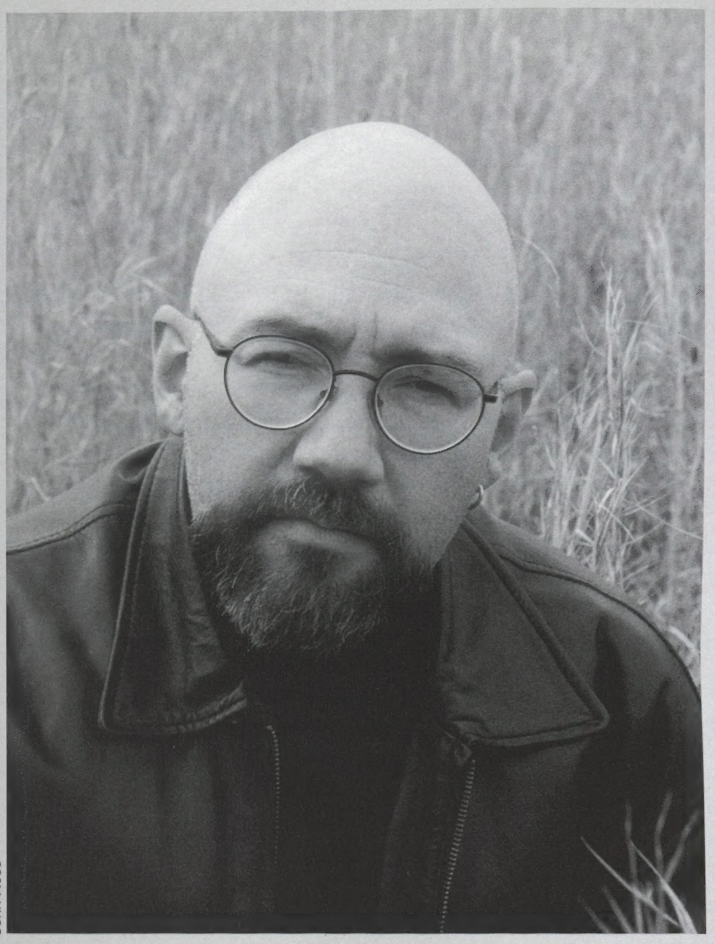
At the same time that he earned his bachelor of arts in English, he also acquired a bachelor of science degree in recreation, with a nature interpretation emphasis. He worked briefly as a naturalist at Pipestem Resort State Park in Pipestem, W.Va. This love of nature, reflected in poems such as "Goldenrod Seeds," is also a gift from his father. "Along with being a great reader, my father is passionate about gardening. He encouraged me — sometimes I was quite unwilling — but he encouraged me to help him with his maple syrup-making and wood-chopping and gardening. I guess I've gotten from him not only an appreciation of literature but also of the outdoors and nature, which is a very strong part of a lot of what I write."

What Mann terms his "Appalachian poems" — such as the ones contained in *Mountain Fireflies,* a collection about Appalachian country life that won the 1999 Poetic Matrix Chapbook Series — are his attempts to hang onto the Appalachian culture of his youth. It is a way of life he believes is under attack by the homogenizing tendencies of American culture. For example, he mourns the passing of old-fashioned Appalachian home cooking. "People have gotten so wrapped up in what they need to do to make a living that they just don't have time to make a batch of biscuits and put on some creecy greens," says Mann.

Preserving Appalachian life is a crusade he carries into the classroom. In addition to serving as an instructor of freshman composition, Southern and gay/lesbian literature, and creative writing classes, he also teaches introductory Appalachian studies at Virginia Tech. "I have a mission when I teach that class, which is to encourage students from the region to really feel good about where they're from. I'm trying to give them ammunition against the kind of nastiness that a lot of them have already experienced — you know, all the stereotypes about dumb hillbillies," explains the Southwest Virginia native. "I really want those local kids in my classes to come out of there feeling very proud of being from the region — and the kids from outside Appalachia to have some sense of the sweep of the culture and history here."

In addition to *Mountain Fireflies,* Mann has also published two other chapbooks: *Bliss,* the winner of the 1997 Stonewall Chapbook Competition, and *Flint Shards from Sussex,* which won the first Gival Press Chapbook Competition in 1999. The Arlington, Va.-based Gival Press will combine the poems in both *Bliss* and *Flint Shards* into a book-length volume entitled *Bones Washed With Wine,* due out this year. Most recently, Mann won the 2001 Key West Writing Contest in poetry.

His poetry and essays have appeared in journals such as *Appalachian Heritage, Journal of Appalachian Studies, Kestrel, Antietam Review, Poet Lore,* as well as *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel.* Other outlets for his essays include *Rebel Yell* and *Rebel Yell 2,* collections of essays and short stories by Southern gay men, and a collection of Mann's essays, *Edge,* to be produced by Binghamton, N.Y.-based Haworth Press in 2003.



John Ross

Jeff Mann

This summer, he's in Charleston, W.Va., where he'll spend part of his time on *Devoured,* a novella for New York City's Kensington Books about a gay hillbilly vampire. "I'm going to try to straddle my several constituencies," he jokes. "You know, the gay community, the Appalachian community, and — what? The vampire community?" The inspiration for the book came from his years of using the vampire in literature and film as the theme for his freshman composition classes, a gambit designed to keep his students engaged, interested, and, considering the fact it was an 8 a.m. class last semester, awake. "I'm probably as aware as anybody how difficult it will be to write a vampire anything with an original touch to it," he laughs.

Writing prose under contract is a relatively novel experience for Mann. "I've mainly been writing poetry for most of my life, and there's no pressure on poets because nobody really cares if they produce anything," he notes wryly. "Now that I have a contract for this novel, I actually get an advance, but then there's all these due dates. I'm not used to pressure. It's certainly different from sitting in your office or at home, writing poems that people may or may not ever hear." Writing poems people may not ever hear? Given Mann's recent record of publication and awards, he's probably in more danger of stumbling across the occasional gay hillbilly vampire roaming the mountains of Appalachia.

—JHW

The East Tennessee State University Department of English

Third Prize

Judy Loest

This is a deceptively good poem. When I read its title, I thought, not another poem on this subject! But as I kept rereading it, I noticed how very well-made it is, from beginning to end. Its lines and enjambments and stanzas are quite solid, and it's quietly satisfying in its phrasing. I will not soon forget "A group of men idle by the cars,/ Smoking, trading the names of their dead," or the stanza that begins with Saran Wrap and ends with a Bruegel painting — and pulls it off!

— Michael McFee

Family Reunion

The day folds in on itself, descending
Like the slow spiral of a buzzard floating
Soundless as a single feather miles beyond
The ridge of sycamore, sourwood, and pine
Here on Bays Mountain in late summer.

Babies have fallen asleep, small boys
Wade knee-deep in a clear stream
Catching crawdads in Styrofoam cups;
A group of men idle by the cars,
Smoking, trading the names of their dead.

Under the shelter, women sit talking
Around a picnic table of ruined cakes
And photo albums, conjuring my dead father
With their stories, transforming his ghost
From boy to man and back again.

Someone turns to me and says
"You look just like your mother,"
And my mother, who looks at me and smiles,
Looks like her mother. We turn again
To clearing the long table in silence,

Covering salad bowls with Saran Wrap,
Casseroles with foil, waving away flies
As the sun sinks below the tree line
And the scene goes still for a moment
Like a painting of Bruegel's peasants

While all around the landscape fast-forwards
Through the seasons, dying and being reborn.
The sycamore's bark curls and peels like paper;
The photographs fade, somewhere a great dark bird
Completes his slow and ordained descent.

— Judy Loest

"Anyone of a certain age who attends a family reunion finds the experience a bit surreal," says Judy Loest. It was after one of those surreal gatherings that she walked away with the images that coalesced into her poem, "Family Reunion."

The reunion in question was a get-together of her father's family at Bays Mountain State Park in Kingsport, Tenn. Although the McClellan family is a large one, its reunions have been few and far between. "Seeing the aged faces not only brought me back to my childhood but also moved me forward to my demise, really, because your mortality is so prominent at those occasions."

Loest's father, J.B. McClellan, had been born into a farming family in Snowflake, Va., "a spot in the road" located in Scott County between Big Stone Gap and Gate City. It was where the poet spent her early childhood. "We had maybe two churches, and there was a combination service station/post office/general store, with the big stove in the middle around which the men sat in the winter. Actually, my childhood is like another time," she muses. "There's a great span of lifestyle changes between 1947, when I was born in Snowflake, and 2002 in Knoxville, where I live now. I feel I've come a great distance."

Her mother, Betty Ramey McClellan, had been born in Wise County, Va., but came to Snowflake when a county road agent took over her care when she was five years old. Loest's ill grandmother had been trying to raise her three children all by herself in hard times. "My mom lived there on that county road agent's farm, and she learned a great many skills, which has made her a fabulous mother," says Loest.

After Loest's father left farming and got a job at the Tennessee Eastman Co., the family moved to Kingsport when Loest was nine. Her mother worked at the local hospital, beginning in housekeeping and ultimately working in surgical supply where she maintained inventory and prepared surgical trays for operations. Her father died at home of kidney failure at the age of 43 when Loest was just 17. She remembers that the only suit he ever owned, bought just five months earlier for her high school graduation, was the one in which he was buried.

It was on a blind double date that Loest met her husband, Robert, a young Naval officer home on leave in Kingsport for Thanksgiving. They were engaged by Christmas. The couple spent the first three-and-a-half years of their marriage moving from Norfolk to Europe to Jacksonville, Fla. After Robert left the Navy, they settled for a time in Tallahassee, Fla., where he completed his doctorate in biology. In 1979, they came back north to Knoxville to be closer to family, including Loest's mother who still lives in Kingsport. Robert Loest now owns IPS Advisory, Inc., and manages two mutual funds.

While in Knoxville, Loest finally finished her education, earning first a bachelor's degree in English and later a master's degree in creative writing from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her thesis included both short fiction and poetry. Currently her time is taken up with her duties as a member of both the Friends of the Knox County Library System and the

Knoxville Writers' Guild boards of directors. Part of her work with the Writers' Guild, a support group, includes serving on the committee for the Peter Taylor Prize for the Novel, an annual competition sponsored by the Guild and the University of Tennessee Press. Recently she became the director and judge for the Libba Moore Gray Poetry Prize, another annual Guild competition in memory of the late Knoxville poet and children's author.

And of course, Loest writes. In addition to appearing in *Now & Then,* her poetry has been published in the Guild anthologies, *All Around Us: Poems from the Valley* and *Breathing the Same Air.* This past February, her work appeared in the online literary journal, *The Cortland Review* (www.cortlandreview.com). "I was really pleased to be in *The Cortland Review* not only because it's a really great online journal, but also because I'm listed in their archives just a couple of people below poet Phillip Levine," she laughs. "Of course, it's an alphabetical listing, but still, it's a stellar group." She won the Libba Moore Gray Poetry Prize herself in 1998 and an honorable mention in *Now & Then's* 1998 Appalachian Poetry Competition. In addition, she has received a special merit award in the 2000 League of American Penwomen's Soul-Making Literary Contest and the Vesle Fenstermaker Poetry Prize at the 2000 Indiana University Writers' Conference. Loest was accepted at this year's Appalachian Writers' Workshop in Hindman, Ky.

In her spare time, she designed and maintains a web page, *Union Avenue* (www.geocities.com/jloest/). The UT alumna explains with a laugh, "What I'm trying to do is use the web site to promote literature in a town that is *consumed* with football."

Why does she write poetry? "Well," she answers, "it's a wonderful creative outlet. And I think it's a spiritual exercise. As a person who has a faith but one that isn't tied to a particular denomination, I find that I often feel at sea without an anchor, so to speak. So you gather things around you that give you a sense of control. And manipulating language is a way to exercise control over your universe, however self-delusional the effort to control that universe may be. Poetry," she continues, "is no different than the circular mandalas made by Zen monks. The mandalas, like poetry, allow them to access a deeper consciousness."

Robert Loest

Judy Loest

When asked if she considers herself an Appalachian writer, she says, "I don't know. It's hard to answer that. When you're from a place, your work is so imbued with that place because it makes up a big part of who you are. So it's hard to deny that I'm at least partially an Appalachian writer. But I guess I would like to be known simply as a writer who touches on universal human experience — of which the Appalachian experience is certainly a part."

—JHW

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"My Neighbor's Naiad"
Elizabeth Banks
Elizabethton, Tennessee

"Unearthing"
Linda R. Bell
Knoxville, Tennessee

"Lula Bell Sings"
"Mr. Coffee's New Pegs"
Joyce Compton Brown
Boiling Springs, North Carolina

"The Last Days of Amelia Earhart"
Mark DeFoe
Buckhannon, West Virginia

"Sunbathing with Elvis"
Donna Doyle
Knoxville, Tennessee

"Rocks"
Sarah Earls
New Tazewell, Tennessee

"Housekeeping"
Connie Jordan Green
Lenoir City, Tennessee

"In and Out of the Horse Latitudes"
Mary Susan Imo
Dunbar, West Virginia

"Out of Silence, for Sister Wendy"
"Global"
Marilyn Kallet
Knoxville, Tennessee

"In Mendel's Garden"
Susan M. Lefler
Brevard, North Carolina

"Eve, Leaving the Garden for Good"
"A Child at the Movies, 1957"
Judy Loest
Knoxville, Tennessee

"Bereft"
Jeff Mann
Blacksburg, Virginia

"When Mother Dies"
Llewellyn McKernan
Barboursville, West Virginia

"Cleaning Out and Finding"
Jim Minick
Riner, Virginia

"Trompe L'Oeil"
Valerie Nieman
Greensboro, North Carolina

"Eve at the Louvre"
Lynn Powell
Oberlin, Ohio

"Watching"
Ann Shurgin
Waller, Texas

"Reply to Owen's Theory of Dreams"
"Stasis, Time, and Perspective"
Rufus A. Skeens
Bristol, Virginia

"Tracks"
Brenda Smart
Cary, North Carolina

"Thinking About Dirt"
Lori Wilson
Morgantown, West Virginia

"November"
Chris Wood
Albany, Georgia

5 Doors, 3 Windows
Writing Against the Odds

by Cathy Lentes

A poet answers her calling in the sitting room of an old Appalachian Ohio farmhouse, a room with doors that don't quite hold the world at bay.

Each day, I sit down to write in a room with five doors and three windows. The architecture is interruption enough. Add to this three children, a husband, four cats, one dog, plus the call of nearby kitchen and laundry and the occasional roaming goat or cow, escaped from the neighbor's farm, which I must shoo from the garden. Still I write, for that is what I came to this place to do.

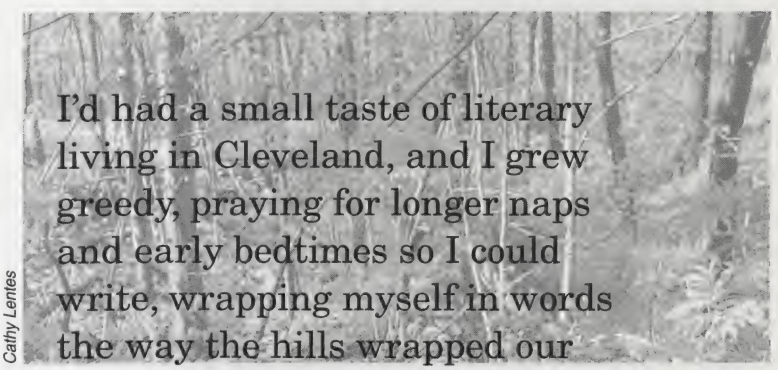
Fifteen years ago, my husband and I flew the coop on a whim—leaving Cleveland, secure jobs, and fairly certain suburban futures for the unknown world of Appalachian Ohio. Children of the 1960s and 1970s, we harbored some vestigial longing for the ideal simple life, back-to-nature living, something close to the land, where our lives and dreams could thrive.

Though a city boy, my husband wanted horses. He hungered for their wildness and beauty. I wanted space, trees, and water, a place to raise a family away from busy streets and day-care centers and endless cycles of mind-numbing work. Most of all, I wanted time—time to write, time to breathe, time to remember who I was.

After a year of struggling and searching, we settled into a farmhouse built in 1890, now surrounded by second-growth forest and tumbledown barns. With a four-year-old son, a newborn daughter, and a mile-and-a-quarter gravel road between us and pavement, my husband dove into a law practice and a search for horses, and I sought moments between diapers and dishes to commit to art.

I was not a good stay-at-home mother, though the world probably saw me that way. I did all the necessary things, but my mind wandered. I'd had a small taste of literary living in Cleveland, and I grew greedy, praying for longer naps and early bedtimes so I could write, wrapping myself in words the way the hills wrapped our farm, sometimes blocking out the sun.

I kept a journal, which grew poems and the first tentative



Cathy Lentes

I'd had a small taste of literary living in Cleveland, and I grew greedy, praying for longer naps and early bedtimes so I could write, wrapping myself in words the way the hills wrapped our farm, sometimes blocking out the sun.

Morgan Lentes

Cathy Lentes and son, John, stand amid the old farmhouse and outbuildings that are the setting for her muse.

stirrings toward publication. A teacher by training, I took to the local public schools when my son began kindergarten, volunteering in the classroom of anyone who would have me, spreading the religion of writing with missionary zeal. Here I found true joy — no longer laboring over weekly spelling lists or timed subtraction, I whizzed from room to room planting poems in pockets, lugging satchels of books to inspire new writers, compiling anthologies of young poets' work. Who needed anything more in the world than this creative captive audience?

At the same time, my own poems began to appear in print, first in local college journals, then spreading farther afield. Having another baby proved tricky, but as she nursed or slept, I scribbled notes about motherhood on old envelopes or grocery lists. As soon as she could walk, I bundled her along on school visits. She toddled through the classroom aisles as my miniature sidekick or writing team mascot.

When she learned to climb out of the crib at age two, I began to scheme. If I moved her in with her sister, the nursery could be mine, a Virginia Woolf room of my own with one window framing the hillside path and a door that closed against the world.

Meanwhile, my husband made friends with a local adventurer who had survived two plane crashes, one caused by an inflight hive of frantic bees trapped in the cockpit. This man regularly led hunting expeditions into the Western wilderness and the upper reaches of Canada. His home sported entire stuffed bears, coyotes, and antelope heads. For fun, he tossed pellets of dry cat food into the air and then shot them to dust with an impressive-looking gun. And he had horses, lots of horses. Soon we had a mustang and two ponies grazing in our pasture and plenty of stories of our own to tell.

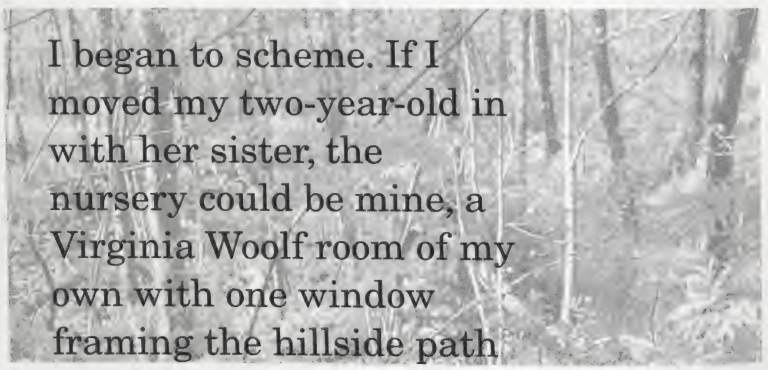
Living here, writing here, has never been easy. Stranded on our hillside for days during flood time, we've watched as Leading Creek and the Ohio River spread over the valley and washed away many of our neighbors' homes. One winter buried us under 26 inches of snow. The thermometer plunged to 40-below, and we were reduced to breaking off and boiling down icicles for water.

The horses, too, prove troublesome, spending more time pushing down fences and throwing us than working their way into my heart. My husband, however, remains besotted, despite trips to a distant emergency room for stitches and midnight chases across the neighbor's front yard.

Through it all, I write. Writing keeps me sane, gives me a way to get it out, get it down. And this place where I live, these hills, those damn horses, the children — my own and my young students — have molded me as a writer, given me a voice. I know without a doubt that had we stayed in Cleveland, I would be on a very different path. I belong to these trees, the river, these sometimes smothering hills, as I have never belonged to anything else.

I remember as a child at school watching a documentary about an Appalachian family forced to move to Cincinnati in search of work, leaving behind the woods and hills that fed both their bodies and spirits. Even then, I thought this was the saddest story I had ever heard. As a child of the flatlands of Ohio, I grew up with a love for the open fields of corn and wheat stretching off to the horizon; my house, however, nestled in the heart of rustling oaks and maples, delicate dogwoods, and a fragrant cherry at the back door. The forest was my playground, the setting for all my best adventures, and the muse that set my heart to words. The thought of losing that, either then or as an adult — raising my own children without birdcall, deer, or turkeys clattering in the spring woods — seemed unthinkable. So we persist in this experiment against the odds.

The children grow. My son, now almost eighteen, increases my gray hairs daily by driving these twisting, curling hills alone. My daughters, too, spread wings, bringing me back to five doors, three windows — for the sunny nook I claimed as mine



I began to scheme. If I moved my two-year-old in with her sister, the nursery could be mine, a Virginia Woolf room of my own with one window framing the hillside path and a door that closed against the world.

Cathy Lentes

"Inspiration Bench" sits by the Lentes' pond.

years ago, the one with one door and one window, has been returned. A teen-age daughter also needs a room of her own.

So I have landed here in the old sitting room at the base of the stairs where everything lives and breathes and goes — in and out, round and round. As I write this, snow blows fast and cold, transforming the hillsides from the grays and browns of damp leaves to crisp, white sheets. Three windows give a panoramic view. Soon, when spring comes, I will open one of the doors, the one that spills out onto the porch. I will take my pen and pad and wander out under the hundred-year maples, then circle the pond, scattering frogs and tadpoles as I go. I will watch for snapping turtles that sun themselves when the cats are away mousing and remember why we came to this place. I will write it all down and pass it on because that is who I am and what I am called to do. N&T

In addition to Now & Then, *Cathy Lentes' poems have appeared in* Appalachian Heritage, Blueline, Riverwind, Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel, *and others. Her poem, "Approaching Chester, Ohio," which won* Now & Then's *Year 2000 Appalachian Poetry Competition, is included in the anthology,* I Have My Own Song for It: Modern Poems of Ohio, *released this spring from the University of Akron Press.*

Ted Cooley

Job Market Report & Mass Media Non-existence

No getting ahead —
staying put. I stay put.

I follow my same tracks home.
The footpath knows me.

Notice the same birds come to visit,
measure the sapling's growth year by year.

Years pass. The small changes
part of the larger ones.

The small ones — my morning news.
Are you tuned in? My evening news too.

I don't get ahead.
I stay put.

No surprise you haven't noticed.

— Jonathan Greene

Jonathan Greene's 20th collection of poems, Fault Lines, *is due this year from Larkspur Press. He runs Gnomon Press, is a free-lance book designer, farms, and has very little time on his hands.*

ESSAY

Lament

by Rita A. Mariotti

The eyes of an Eastern Kentucky miner still haunt a family physician.

The three-story red brick hospital in the little Eastern Kentucky town, one-tenth the size of the city hospitals of my medical training, was bright and clean against a blue sky that molded itself over the leek-green, tree-covered mountains. In the early morning, fog settled between the mountains like mounds of cotton balls, muffling what few sounds emerged from the small town below.

The hospital was one in a chain of eight in Appalachia built by the United Mine Workers of America. During the waning months of my internship in the spring of 1958, a sobering reality hit me: I was not ready to go into private practice on my own. An advertisement in a medical journal about Miners' Hospitals in Eastern Kentucky promised experience, adventure, and an attractive stipend of $12,000 a year, compared to the annual $1,200 I had earned as an intern. I signed on and entered a very different, unfamiliar universe.

I stood on the second-floor balcony outside my small efficiency apartment, looking apprehensively across a well-kept lawn at the hospital about one-quarter of a city block away. I kept looking at the hospital, hesitant to walk over and start this new phase of my life. Suddenly the internship I had just left felt more secure; there was always someone to lean on for help. Now I was a staff physician — salaried, in authority. Although I yearned for this independence, I was not sure I was ready for it.

The telephone became a hated instrument, especially when rattling me from a deep and welcome sleep. I spent hours plotting how to keep nurses' home phones ringing all night after they woke me repeatedly requesting sleeping pills for insomniac patients. When my phone rang for a bona fide emergency, there was no time to think as I threw myself into hospital clothes and ran the short distance across the grounds to the emergency room.

Rita Mariotti

Rita Mariotti was accepted in 1958 as a staff physician at Miners' Memorial Hospital in Eastern Kentucky.

On one occasion when I arrived breathless in the emergency room, Jesse Campbell lay quietly on the ER bed clutching his chest. His wide eyes spoke the fear his tongue could not express. His vital signs were stable, and the injected morphine produced almost instant relief of his chest pain. His eyelids relaxed and covered

soft brown eyes. After I drew blood for analysis, the intravenous fluid ran through the needle, keeping an open pathway for any medications he might later need; oxygen flowed via a nasal catheter.

We moved him on his bed to a small private room to do an electrocardiogram. There were no monitoring screens, no elaborate electrical connections, no rush of nurses or other staff members, and no code blue. The scene consisted of the patient, doctor, one nurse, an intravenous tube, nasal oxygen, and morphine. This was 1959 in an isolated hospital in the hills of depressed Appalachia. The electrocardiogram confirmed a heart attack, and heparin, a blood thinner, was added to the treatment.

Jesse's wife had the lack of expression typical of miners' wives. She did, however, appear to be relieved when I told her Jesse was resting comfortably and that everything we could do was being done. Mrs. Campbell returned to the waiting room, and I settled down to a long night of observation. I kept seeing Jesse's anxious eyes. Their sense of fear and danger was contagious.

Now I was a staff physician — salaried, in authority. Although I yearned for this independence, I was not sure I was ready for it.

The stillness of the room was interrupted by a groan. The whites of Jesse's eyes rolled to prominence as his breath stopped. The stethoscope heard only my own heart thumping in my ears. He had no peripheral pulses; his pupils, high in their sockets, were dilated. His face and hair were slick with sweat. *Thwack!* My fist hit his chest — once — twice. Nothing. My mouth girded his as I blew hot, nervous breath into his lungs. *Thwack!* — again. Nothing.

As I screamed for the nurse, I found the vial of adrenaline on the emergency cart and drew up the standard amount into a syringe fitted with a four-inch cardiac needle. My fingers slid over his left fifth anterior rib onto the soft space above. With the needle poised, I entered the skin and muscle and pushed into more resistant cardiac musculature. When blood swirled up into the syringe, I plunged the fluid into the left ventricle, withdrew the needle, and released my breath. My hand resting on his chest felt his heart and mine beating as one. The nurse was there in an instant, and we both were encouraged by the return of a few heartbeats.

They did not last. The quivering, uncoordinated contractions of a dying heart refused to reverse. In the late 1950s, electrocardioversion, the stimulation of the heart by hand-held electric paddles to convert the heart to normal rhythm, had not yet been invented. There was nothing more I could do. Jesse died.

Courtesy of Rita Mariotti

Mariotti relaxes on the hospital grounds.

The sense of hopelessness and despondency over the loss of a patient never changes, even after forty years of practicing medicine. Feelings of inadequacy and anger plague you. Could something else have been done? Could the death have been prevented? With a mind twisted by doubts, the body somehow finds the courage to inform the family and give needed support. Death is the single most difficult crisis a physician must face, and it never gets easier.

I walked the hospital floors while the body traveled to the morgue. The quiet of the night was interrupted by an occasional distant snore and the sound of a nurse's heels receding along shining linoleum corridors. As I passed Jesse's room, a small light reflected over the crumpled sheets on his empty bed. I stared, haunted by the memory of fear in his eyes.

I realized then that he knew he was going to die. The next day, I would complain to my colleagues about losing sleep and spending an unsuccessful night on call. We frequently joked and made accusations to hide the hurt felt after losing a patient. That night, however, I walked to the bed, lay on the sheets still moist from Jesse's sweat, and wept. N&T

Associated Press Wirephoto, courtesy of Rita Mariotti.

Many of Mariotti's patients came from families of striking coalminers. She sent this newspaper clipping home to show her parents.

Rita A. Mariotti is a family physician who retired after 40 years of practice. She is presently living in Glendora, N.J., and enjoying life as a freelance writer. She has been published in The New York Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer, *and* Medical Economics, *among other publications.*

Part of a book-length memoir currently seeking an agent and publisher, this essay was previously published in May 1998 in The Pennsylvania Gazette, *The University of Pennsylvania's alumni magazine.*

ESSAY

Ray Hicks and the Doctors

by Joseph Sobol

A famed traditional Appalachian storyteller uses his stock of stories to show health care providers and patients alike how to face change with grace.

When I arrived at the Medical Center in Johnson City, Tennessee, one evening in the spring of 2001, Ray Hicks, the patriarch of American traditional storytellers, was in one of those tiny cubicles in the innards of the emergency room on a narrow, rolling bed a foot too short for him. A cultural standoff was in progress.

He'd been there since just after noon. The hospital staff seemed to be hoping that he'd get tired and go home — after first making an appointment to come back and see a specialist like a good citizen of the nation of Modern Medicine. Ray's family knew that he was not now, nor had he ever been, a citizen of that nation, and that if they took him back home to North Carolina, they'd never get him back down. So each camp was trying to wait the other out.

Ray's wife, Rosa, was there, and two of their daughters, Juanita and Jeannette, and also Emily Eddy, the librarian from Jonesborough, Tennessee, who had been so alarmed at Ray's condition on her last visit to his house that she absolutely insisted on coming back the following Monday to drive him to Johnson City. Ray had missed the previous October's National Storytelling Festival for the first time since he'd broken his back in 1976. All winter, he had struggled, unable to keep food down or to digest it, and he had grown as thin and wasted as a blighted pine tree. He was in a great deal of pain and discomfort, there where his unpadded bones rubbed the unpadded gurney, and if he hadn't been so weak, he surely would have bolted hours ago.

I went to the person behind the desk and asked her a rhetorical question. "Did you know," I asked, "that you have one of the greatest traditional storytellers in America in that room in there and that you've had him in there waiting for six hours?"

She said she'd heard something about that, yes, and that they had to have a doctor come and look at him in order to admit him, and the doctors were all very busy. But they would keep on working at it.

So they worked at it for another hour or so, and we kept Ray company as best we could. Finally, at around quarter to eight, a green-scrubbed intern came sweeping into the cubicle with a medical student at either arm, each holding a clipboard. The intern had been briefed. "Well, now, is this Mr. Raymond Hicks, the famous storyteller?" he asked.

The intern kept asking brief questions and struggling to deflect the answers before Ray could get up any kind of head of steam. It was like watching a game of cultural pingpong, where the service kept changing sides.

Everyone began to stammer in protest till Juanita summarized: "His name is Leonard Ray Hicks, but everyone just calls him Ray."

"Well, then, Mr. Hicks, I'm here to take your medical history. What seems to

be the matter today?"

When Ray heard the word *history,* he suddenly figured he was in the right place. So he put his hands behind his head, stretched out a bit and said, "We-e-ll, it all started back in nineteen and seventy-five when I went to entertain at the governor of Tennessee's place in Nashville, Tennessee, and on the way back, my water stopped. ..."

Tom Raymond

Ray Hicks signs an autograph for a child during the 1987 National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tenn.

All the other adults in the room began furiously interpreting between Ray and the intern as we tried to translate from the endless and seamless world of stories to the fragmented terrain of medical data. He'd had a prostate operation in 1975, it hadn't gone well, and he'd had discomfort ever since. He broke his back in 1976 in a truck accident, he'd spent many months recovering, and still had pain from that. He hadn't been able to keep food down or let it out all winter, and he'd been losing weight that he couldn't afford to lose. And that was it — that was his whole medical history.

"So how are you feeling right now, Mr. Hicks?"

And Ray began: "When I was a boy, we had two cows.

"And I had to take 'em over the mountain to graze 'cause they'd eat up all the tender grass near the house. And one day when we uz over yander, it came on to stormin' and a-thunderin' and a-lightnin', and I was scairt I'z gonna be struck and killed. So I ran and hid inside a hollered-out tree stump.

"And then I saw that there was a nest o' white blood-suckin' spiders in that holler log, and they was a-crawlin' up my pants legs and a-bitin' and suckin' my blood. And I didn't know whether to climb out o' there and maybe get struck and killed by lightnin' or to stay in there and get bitten up by them blood-suckin' spiders.

"And," Ray concluded, "that's about how I feel right now."

"Hmm," said the intern impatiently. "What about drinking, Mr. Hicks? Do you have a drinking problem?"

Ray looked around at us with that glint in his eye. "Only problem is — cain't afford it none." And Ray had begun to discourse on the differences between patent whiskey and moonshine and the different grades and potencies of the latter when the doctor cut him off.

"What about smoking? Do you still smoke?"

"Don't smoke nothin' but what I roll my own. Prince Albert. Healthier than the store-bought kind — it don't have so many chemicals."

The intern was not very interested in the subtleties of store-bought vs. homemade whiskey and tobacco. He kept asking brief questions and struggling to deflect the answers before Ray could get up any kind of head of steam. It was like watching a game of cultural pingpong, where the service kept changing sides. Finally, Ray took dead-aim between that intern's eyes; he rared back and said, "Now what you'uns are a-sayin' puts me in mind —

"— of a feller lived up near me who swore that he had a cat in his stomach.

"And none of his friends could tell him no different. He just said he had a cat in his stomach and it a-botherin' him.

"And his friends got together, and they went in it with a doctor. Real medical doctor, jus' like you-uns. And they talked it over, and they decided that to help this feller, they was gonna have to operate. Only they was gonna go out and get them a cat. And when that feller woke up from the operation, they was gonna hold up that cat. And say, 'Here it is — we got 'im!'

"So that's what they did. They took this feller, and they put him under fast asleep, and when he opened his eyes, they held out this cat — they had 'em a gray tomcat. And they held it up to the feller, and they said, 'Here it is — we got 'im!'

"Now, that feller opened his eyes, and he looked at that gray tomcat. And he looked at the doctor and at his friends all standin' round, and he said: 'That ain't the one. The one inside o' me's a black 'un.'

"So if you're fixin' on operatin' on somebody," Ray said to the intern, "you got to remember — first you got to find out what color's the cat!"

Now the intern had slowly relaxed during this performance into the state all storytellers know as the Story Listening Trance. His mouth hung open. His eyes had glazed over. He had lost all his doctorly authority and rigor. In fact, he had lost his tongue and his senses altogether and simply stood there, staring sullenly at Ray for a long time while the medical students snorted and chortled and slapped their clipboards. And every time I looked at that intern's stunned face, I would be catapulted back a step or two with glee till eventually, and I can't explain how this happened, I fell to the hard linoleum floor and actually bounced up again like one of those inflatable clown dolls that can't stay down. The room was in utter pandemonium around the tableau of Ray, smiling in triumph from the prone position, and the defeated and slack-jawed doctor standing over him.

Finally the intern roused himself and announced in a crestfallen way that he would now have to administer a prostate exam. All except for Rosa and the medical students had to scurry out of the

room. The curtain was drawn for a long, solemn moment. Then it was thrown back, and the intern marched out, flanked by his medical students, their clipboards held high. He said something in medicalese to the duty nurse, and the troika disappeared down the corridor.

Word went up and down — they would admit Ray Hicks to the hospital. When I went back in the cubicle, Ray was muttering to Rosa, "The places that feller was a-pokin' me, I was fixin' to snap his finger off."

But Ray's spirits were now much improved. When I came to his bedside, he said, "I know now why they're gonna let me in here. It's so's I can teach to 'em."

And so it was. Ray spent the next several days in the Johnson City Medical Center, teaching to the doctors, nurses, staff, and other patients — to anyone who came near him — about grace in the face of change.

The following day, Ray was diagnosed with a cancer of the prostate and colon that had metastasized to his bones. He would be treated with some short-term chemotherapy and released to home hospice care. When I went to visit that day, Ray was downstairs receiving more tests. Rosa was there, and Susan O'Connor of the International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough.

Susan was shaking her head in wonder. "Ray took a walk this morning after they told him," she said. "And when he got back to the door of his room, he just turned around to all the people in the corridor, and he announced — in that great Ray voice, you know — he said, 'If I'm gonna go, I might as well go singing!' And he raised up his hand and started singing this song that went something like, 'I'm gonna lay down my old guitar.' Then he just turned around and went back in his room, leaving everybody kind of awestruck. I wish you could have heard it."

I wish I could have heard it, too. But I got to hear the story.

Gonna lay down my old guitar.
Gonna lay down my old guitar.
I wish I could strop it to my side,
And carry it along with me.

They had put Ray on the pediatric ward — for reasons of space, they said — but somehow it seemed right. The following day when I went to visit, the doctors came in to give him his shot of chemo. They shooed us out of the room and closed the door. While I waited outside, I saw a little girl coming down the hall with her grandmother. The little girl was freckle-faced and blue-eyed, with just a few colorless wisps of hair and patches of fuzz on her scalp. Her grandmother was shaking with palsy and clinging to the railing along the wall. It was hard to say which one was sicker.

I said hello to the little girl, and then I had an idea. "Hey," I asked her, "do you like stories?"

She nodded.

"Well, today's your lucky day because one of the best storytellers in the country is staying right there on your hall, which makes you neighbors. So maybe sometime when you and he aren't busy, you can stop by for a visit, and he can tell you a story."

She nodded.

Ray's spirits were now much improved. When I came to his bedside, he said, "I know now why they're gonna let me in here. It's so's I can teach to 'em."

Just then the door opened, and the doctor swept by. "Well," I said, "maybe if he's feeling OK now, you can come in and introduce yourself." So we went in.

"Ray," I said, "this is your neighbor, Kimberly. She's staying on this hall, and she says she likes stories."

Ray asked her last name and the grandmother's last name, and after careful consideration, they determined that they were probably nearabout kinfolk. So after that ritual was completed, Ray began:

"Now this story is about a time when grownup folks didn't mind hittin' and beatin' children. Parents, teachers, neighbors, the same. They'd beat a child till he had bruises in his bones sometimes. It happened to me. Teachers, they'd whup you with a board or a strop, put bruises in the bones o' your legs, arms. Sometimes'd never come out.

"Now one time that happened to Jack. His father beat him for not cuttin' the wood, doin' the chores. Put bruises in his bones. Jack decided he was gonna light out. Run away. Get out o' there."

And Ray went on to tell the story of "Jack and the Animals," in which Jack rounds up a crew of old, sick, feeble, abandoned animals — a horse, an ox, a dog, a cat, and a rooster — and they manage to defeat poverty, brutality, crime, and the lack of love just by cleverness, grace, and by sticking together. Ray lay back in the hospital bed and told the story with total concentration while the IV monitors bleeped and the hospital intercom crackled and summoned the doctors to this or that emergency code — and all of that ceased to exist. In the end, Jack and the castoff animals had a home, plenty of gold, and a new family made up of one another. And the little girl and her palsied granny stood in the doorway and listened and stared only at the storyteller.

And at the story's end, when Jack and the animals were happy and safe, I turned to the little girl and said, "You know, you're a lucky girl to have heard that story today from this man." And she nodded and skipped off down the hall.

When she was gone, her grandmother said, "She don't even have a daddy. Her daddy's plumb mean. Found him another woman 'fore she was even born. Won't even send her a Christmas card."

And it hit me that Ray had somehow selected the one story in the Jack tale repertoire in which Jack's father is plumb mean too. How he knew is between him and the mysterious source of all human grace. But I thought that whatever else happens in that little girl's life (no matter how long or how brief), on that day, she was like Jack and like the rest of us who've had the grace to have had a transcendent storyteller in our lives: just plain lucky. N&T

Joseph Sobol — accomplished storyteller, musician, and folklorist — is coordinator of the graduate program in Storytelling at East Tennessee State University. He lives in Jonesborough, Tenn.

Flash Burn

by Jim Minick

A young college student undergoes an all-too-literal baptism by fire.

The yellow Ryder rental truck inches up to the full-service island. I wait with Jerry Hall, the manager and only other person on duty. Earlier in the summer, a rental truck had scraped an island roof and almost hit Stretch Hoover, so we know to wait for this one to come to a full stop.

Once I hear the engine die, I start toward the driver. Jerry, with his tiny voice coming out of a barrel chest, smirks a "Be careful" as he goes to pump another car. The rental driver is in a hurry to use the restroom, so he tells me to fill it up and check the oil. Then he disappears.

I have two hours till the end of my shift, and only one more day of work before I head back to college. I'm ready to leave.

My shirt is already soaked with sweat from the August afternoon humidity, and the fumes and heat coming off of the truck don't help. I have two hours till the end of my shift, and only one more day of work before I head back to college. I'm ready to leave.

The gas cap, heavy steel, unscrews slowly, then dangles on its chain. Fumes flush my face — the guy must have been driving on empty since Plainfield. I lift the nozzle, use it to flick the pump switch, and stick it into the black hole. I squeeze the trigger and get ready to move on to the oil and windows. But the trigger pops out — too much back pressure from the hot tank. I squeeze a second time, and again it clicks off. The pump register shows I've only pumped two cents worth. I curse under my breath.

I squeeze the trigger a third time.

Instantly I am engulfed in flames, flames that pour out of the tank, out of the nozzle, up my arm, my face, into the sky. I don't remember any sound but the whoosh of instant fire.

The force of the explosion throws me backward onto the pavement. I roll and keep looking down my body and over my shoulder to see if I am still on fire. I smell burned flesh, singed hair; my tongue blisters; and my arm — my arm feels like one big flame. I keep looking at it for more flames but only see red-and-black flesh. I wave it in pain, hold it away to save the rest of my body from its fire. And I scream the scream of pain I have never felt before, nor since.

Jerry, the manager, panics, stands in the middle of the lot yelling, "Turn off the pumps. Turn off the pumps." He is closer to the emergency switch, but I stumble to the building and throw the switch first. He finds an extinguisher, races back out to the blaze, forgets about me. He doesn't want the whole gas station to blow.

I collapse into a swivel chair in the garage and keep screaming. Two strangers try to help. One runs to the restaurant to call an ambulance; the other goes for ice. For a while, I am alone, moaning and swiveling back and forth, wondering how much pain I can bear, how much flame I have inhaled, how much time I have.

For a while, I am alone, moaning and swiveling back and forth, wondering how much pain I can bear, how much flame I have inhaled, how much time I have.

swiveling back and forth, wondering how much pain I can bear, how much flame I have inhaled, how much time I have. Out-

The woman EMT talks and pours cool, sterile water over my arm and on my face. I know I'm close to shock, if not there already. She covers me with thick blankets, keeps talking with me, keeps pouring.

side, black smoke covers the yellow truck and scurrying men, but I can't focus, can't help. A woman comes and tries to sit with me, but I think she becomes sick at the sight of me: my burned face and arm and constant cries. I see other faces turn in horror. They don't come close.

Finally the iceman comes, and the cold and his company turn my shrieks to sobs. He asks my name, keeps saying help will come soon, but I can hardly breathe.

Twenty minutes later, the ambulance arrives. I lie down, am lifted, and asked my name again. They want to keep me conscious, out of a coma, so they tell me to talk, ask me questions about school and family. But they can do nothing for the pain. Two miles to the interchange across the county line and they have to switch me to a different ambulance. Every jolt from the gurney's wheels, the gravel, the lifting and sliding makes me moan. Every bump.

In the new ambulance, the driver turns to the woman working over me, asks, "Code 3?" She answers, "Yes, Code 3." I guess it means go as fast as possible. But I know we still have twenty miles to the hospital, ten of them on back roads. I feel every bump.

The woman EMT talks and pours cool, sterile water over my arm and on my face. She empties jug after jug as the pain eases some. But I begin to shake uncontrollably, my body freezing except for the burns. I know I'm close to shock, if not there already. She covers me with thick blankets, keeps talking with me, keeps pouring.

At the emergency room entrance, I see my parents. Mom grabs my good hand and squeezes. They both try to hide the worry on their faces.

Inside, Dr. Rector greets me with "I remember you." And I remember him from five years earlier. A former Navy doctor, he had set my dislocated elbow in one brutal pull and twist, without any painkillers. I remember his black hair, crazy stories, and rough but good hands.

They undress me, cut off the shirt. Naked now, frigid, and closer to shock, I have no veins easy to find. The nurse pokes me in the arm, the hip, and finally the foot to get a blood sample. The IV is just as difficult, and I hear Dr. Rector say, "Good God, woman. Help the boy. Don't kill him." They wheel me to another room to X-ray my lungs, then wheel me back. The anesthesiologist puts a cup over my nose and mouth, tells me to count backward from 100, and I make it to 95.

The next nights and days blur. I remember shots of powerful painkillers, but they are never enough. I remember looking down at a bandage that runs from fingertips to bicep, wondering what happened to cause the explosion and what

Megan Lightell

my arms will be like. And always I remember the torture of seared flesh.

After two days in intensive care, they wheel me to a regular room, where I look into a mirror for the first time. I have no eyelashes or brows, and the raw places on my cheeks and chin have turned to scabs. My tongue has a sore from the busted blister. But I still have a mouth, a nose, and two brown eyes. I still can breathe cool, moist air.

They keep me in the hospital for another three days, long enough for me to tire of the food. But I can taste it. Over those days, friends and family visit and watch with me as a huge blister forms on my bicep. It balloons out of the top of the bandage to the size of a walnut, and we marvel at its grotesqueness.

On the fifth day, my day to go home, Dr. Rector appears. He greets me, then simply grabs the walnut-sized blister and rips it off. He reads my shocked face and replies, "That won't hurt a thing. It was just in the way anyhow." I want to punch him but am overcome with more pain, and with curiosity. He begins unwrapping my arm. Around and around, his hands work, unspiraling the long gauze. I flinch with each pass, feel the rips of flesh with each jerk of the bandage. And I watch the white arm become red, pink, and whole again.

I remember him from five years earlier. A former Navy doctor, he had set my dislocated elbow in one brutal pull and twist, without any painkillers. I remember his black hair, crazy stories, and rough but good hands.

With it uncovered, Dr. Rector asks me to move my fingers, asks about pain or numbness. I tell him my little finger feels asleep constantly. He shakes it, says we'll watch it, but doesn't seem concerned. Instead, the doctor is extremely pleased. He examines my arm, moves it around (despite my grimaces), and says that I am lucky. I had only been flash-burned; the third-degree burns were quick, shallow. There might be some pigment loss, but little scarring, thanks to the medicine. He listens to my breathing and says the same thing about luck with my lungs. I hadn't breathed in any of the flames.

He begins unwrapping my arm. Around and around, his hands work, unspiraling the long gauze. I flinch with each pass, feel the rips of flesh with each jerk of the bandage.

After the examination, he pulls out a small tub of white ointment and begins slathering it on my whole arm. He says the ointment probably looks like my mother's Noxema, but it has silver in it. The little tubs costs over $150, and it's what healed my arm so well. He wraps the arm again and sends me home.

As Dr. Rector predicts, my arm heals well, with little scarring. The elbow is white instead of pink because of the lack of pigment, and my little finger still tingles from nerve damage. But I can still swing a hammer, write a poem, breathe the morning, dew-filled air.

After I get out of the hospital, I return to school a week late but glad to be back among old friends. Then over Thanksgiving break, I go home for good food, rest, and the family reunion. And I work; I need the money. I pump gas for three days, and every time I click the nozzle, I jump.

The next summer, I find a different job. N&T

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University in Radford, Va., and with his wife, Sarah, is currently building a homestead in Wythe County.

Ted Cooley

Driving Force

I could have taken the interstate
after the funeral
but don't. Tonight I want
the river road. I need
the knowledge of water
that has washed for ages over stone
to form this dark gorge.
Tonight give me the hum of an engine
breathing easy in the cool dark,
a road that snakes and clings
to the limestone cliff. I love
the not knowing
what's around each bend, how the old
Chevy lunges into each curve.
Swift God, give me acceleration
and the surge of shifting gears.
Let the wind's cool fingers
rip open the night.
O let this hunk of metal and flesh
lean into that wild darkness
the moan of tires holding on for life.

—Charlie Hughes

Charlie Hughes is an analytical chemist, poet, writer of short stories, and owner of Wind Publications, a small press based in Nicholasville, Ky., which frequently publishes Appalachian authors.

ESSAY

Funny, There Should Be That Quality, Sometimes...

by Barclay Franklin

From time to time, an Appalachian exiled in Arizona feels a mystical connection with her childhood home.

There is a quality, sometimes, about the air, a quality that may be best described by what it isn't. It isn't like the air of summer, heavy and oppressive, smothering you beneath the weight of a humidity just short of visible. It has no invigorating quality like the sharp air of an autumn day. It brings no alacrity of spirit, no bounding blue-sky happiness. It lacks the sting of winter air, never tingling your nose or burning way down deep into the lungs with every breath. It is, as near as I remember, the air of spring in the Appalachians of my childhood — warm, still, sensuous, soft. Funny how the dogs can sense it too, for they know nothing of the Appalachians of my childhood.

We become aware of it together, the dogs and I, though it doesn't swirl. It never blows the wisps of hair across my forehead, no matter how fine the wisps might be. It doesn't depend on movement to make its presence felt. You can't point to leaves or canine ears upturned — or blossoms floating, silver-sequined, on its tide. It has no voice. It never roars like the breath of lions expelled upon the months of spring. It doesn't even sigh. But like an unseen spirit, it is there to wrap you round, the warmth of flannel united to the slippery feel of silken sheets. Like my childhood memories, it brings me a feeling of mellowness, a degree of melancholia, an unspeakable longing and comfort.

Funny. It never comes on clear, bright sunshine days or on days black-banked with rain and wind. The sky is very often neutral when I feel it, light grey and going nowhere. I have come to think of this quality of air as if it were the hand of some great caring Spirit, a presence that I can, almost, admit to. It makes me restless. Most often when I feel it, I take the dogs to wander, semi-solitary, through the Arizona foothills. I walk, with hands down-jammed into my pockets, to no preset destination. I walk for hours beneath the grey skies, going nowhere, in communion with the air.

Like spring in the Appalachians, the presence of that quality of air most often comes after the winters of my life. The dark, cold, despairing days not tied to any calendar page but numbered out in dreams that never quite come true, in friendships gone aslant of even keel, in hopes and aspirations blown off by chilling gales, the hard realities of life. Funny how it comes then, as if it knew that even I need solace sometimes.

The dogs come loping back with tongues hanging out and dripping sweat. In silence, we sit together for some long stretch of time on the tailgate of the truck. They sit to catch their breath, and I, to catch and store away that quality of air, enough to last the stormy days to follow. There is no way I can summon its return, but I have a faith, born of long experience, that it will come again when I most need it.

Funny, there should be that quality, sometimes, about the air... N&T

Barclay Franklin is a writer living and working in Cornville, a rural town in central Arizona. Franklin is the author of the novel, A Race for Glory Run.

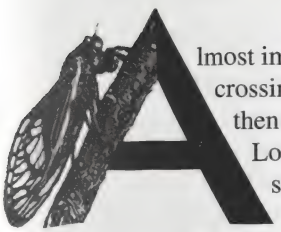
Nancy Fischman, from a photograph by Donald E. Hahn.

Barclay Franklin takes a walk with Scout in the Arizona foothills.

Cicada

by Barbara Weddle

The distinctive sound of an insect triggers memories of hot, muggy Kentucky nights.



Almost immediately after crossing the Ohio River, then driving through Louisville, I hear it — a steady buzzing rising from the trees on either side of the highway that winds through the gentle rolling hills of Northern Kentucky. The buzzing swells to a crescendo, gradually subsides, then begins again, shyly almost, slowly rising in intensity until it is again one loud sustained hum, pulsating in the treetops, filling the woods, then dying away again.

Although it is a sound that I've all but forgotten in the months since I moved north, I quickly recognize it: the cicada, that blackish insect with greenish wings that appears each year in July and August in the South.

I turn the air conditioner off, roll my car window down, and let the familiar chirring noises carry inside. To me, they are tranquil noises, cozy even, like the far-off drone of an outboard motor on a hot summer's night. However, at the same time, they kindle an almost unbearable homesickness inside me for my native Kentucky. For there are memories attached to the humming noises — memories of hot, muggy nights when unexpected fluffs of breeze, heavy with the pungent aroma of magnolia blooms, draped my skin like fine imported silk; of sultry days when tobacco plants, scorched to a yellow-brown, ripened under a blazing sun, and undulating rows of corn stalks made rustling sounds like strips of Velcro being rubbed together. Memories come to mind of lazy summer afternoons canoeing down the Kentucky River, bound on either side by steep rock faces where red-tailed hawks slanted across a serene, cloudless sky.

I recall a summer weekend and a visit to the Cincinnati Art Museum shortly before I moved away. I drove the seventy miles from Lexington to Cincinnati on I-75, a highway landscaped with scattered copses of elm, sycamore, and cypress. The arboreal insects were especially thick that year, and I kept my windows closed as I sped along, for many were winging out across the highway in erratic, misdirected flight paths, appearing out of nowhere like blips on a radar screen, and I was fearful they would fly inside my car.

In Cincinnati, they hung so heavily from the branches of the trees that edged the sidewalk where I walked alongside the museum that I often had to move quickly to one side in order to avoid brushing up against them. Once I glanced up just in time to see a thick-bodied larva pushing from a cocoon fastened to a tree limb, emerging right in front of my face like toothpaste being squeezed from a tube. I screamed and shot off the sidewalk like a badly aimed marble. For the remainder of my museum tour, I avoided the trees when I walked outside the museum.

Now, at evening time, I lie in the small wrought-iron bed in my son's extra bedroom, the window lowered, savoring the sound of a Southern night still clamoring with cicadas calling for their mates, the sound as indigenous to Kentucky as brutal winters are to Wisconsin where I now live. Long after the humming stops and I am drifting into sleep, I can still hear the sound in my head, echoing there, and I think of how grateful I am to be temporarily "home" again, surrounded by loved ones and the gentle noise that brings back all that is familiar and dear to me — the noise of the cicada. N&T

Although she was born in Ohio and now lives in Wisconsin, Barbara Weddle lived for 10 years in Eastern Kentucky, which she considers her true home. A freelance writer who writes mostly essays and short stories about the South, she is now working on a novel. She has four grown children and six grandchildren.

ESSAY

Walking to School

by Martha Wolfe

A young West Virginia girl receives an education about life's dangers while walking to and from school.

I have been having nightmares in which I go off to school without my underwear. My teacher, Mrs. Knight, takes me to Mrs. Robinson's office. She's the principal. I have to call my mom to ask her to bring me some panties. When Mom answers and I tell her what's happened, she laughs. Then she gets mad and fusses at me while I am standing red-faced in the principal's office, talking as quietly as I can. She's not happy, but she'll bring them.

"Now I have to make a trip off the hill." Her voice is too small in the heavy black phone.

"Put them in a brown bag so no one can tell what they are." Can she hear the pleading tone of my voice?

She does it, I think, but sometimes I wake up uncertain. It is a disturbing, recurring nightmare that I can't tell anyone about. So on the first day of school, as I walk down my street toward the City Steps, I have to keep checking under my dress to make sure I have on my panties.

There are two long sets of stairs on our hill, built and maintained by the city of Charleston, West Virginia—the City Steps. Cathy's my best friend. She meets me at the bottom of her set of stairs, the ones down from her house because she lives on the street above me. And down we go, down the next set of stairs to the street below mine. One hundred and twenty-six, with some landings in between. There is a long iron pipe railing between landings, and we like to slide on the more level spots. I have to do the straddle-backwards slide because I can't quite reach the pipe to do the side-straddle slide. The pipe is cold, so I tuck my dress between my legs, cross my ankles over the pipe in back of me—and sl-i-i-i-de.

The last steps toward the bottom are way steep, and I can't slide there yet. My brother can; I've seen him do it. He runs down the steps two and three at a time and takes a flying leap, landing sideways on the bottom pipe rail. He is greased lightning to the street below. Lance can do anything.

It is the first day of first grade. Because there is no kindergarten and my mom doesn't take to church schools, this is my first day of school. Mrs. Knight is going to be my teacher. For years,

For years, I have been sitting in the flowered chair in our living room, watching out the window, waiting for my brother and sister to come home after school. Now it is my turn to carry books full of homework. It is my turn to walk to school.

I have been sitting in the flowered chair in our living room, watching out the window, waiting for my brother and sister to come home after school. Then, when they get home, they aren't interested in playing with me. Now it is my turn to carry books full of homework. It is my turn to walk to school.

Our gang of five best friends walks to Kanawha Elementary School in the morning, home for lunch, back to school, and home again in the afternoon, every day. There is no school bus to Kanawha Elementary. So we walk in the rain, snow,

Nancy Jane Earnest

sun—fall, winter, spring, fall, winter, spring—wearing boots, raincoats, or winter coats with snow pants tucked up under our dresses. We walk. We complain. We walk.

On the way to and from school those first few months, I learn the patrol lady's name (Mrs. Little), how many cracks are in the sidewalk between the corner at Lee Street and the train tracks, how to walk bending forward without dripping a red popsicle on my dress, and how to race a train. Later I learn how to stand down a bully, how to pick myself up and wipe off my bloody knees if pushed from behind, how to ignore insults and slander, how to hide my tears behind a downturned face.

Halfway between school and home are the railroad tracks. Long, slow freight trains travel the double tracks, which means that some days, there are two trains blocking our way to or from school. Sometimes we hear a train coming way down the tracks so we start running, racing the train to the crossing.

You are impatient for life to get on with itself, but you're caught, caught by a train after school. And it sits there. The unthinkable crosses your collective fourth-grade mind.

The engineers blow the horn a mile away, so we run faster, scooting across the tracks as a big old Chessie diesel rolls by. If the gang gets separated, those left behind the train yell, "Wait for me at the store."

Getting caught by the train is one of the only tardy excuses the school accepts—but not too often. Caught by the train: leaning against the cool cinder block plumbing supply house; watching the huge boxcars and coal cars rock-and-roll by; counting the cars, throwing rocks at them, and listening to the rhythm as they hit the loose rail in the middle of the crossing; standing and waiting for the train to pass. At night, the trains whistle, and the cars hit that loose rail in the middle of the crossing, and the sound echoes off the valley floor up to my bedroom window. I never find it anything but comforting, the sound of a train at night. Later, when my family leaves this working-class neighborhood for the better side of town, I can't sleep for months without the sound of the train in the night.

Sometimes it stops. A long train—stopped dead on the tracks. No end in sight in either direction, up or down the tracks. Say you're in fourth grade, and you're walking home from school in a gang. You are impatient for life to get on with itself, but you're caught, caught by a train after school. And it sits there. And you start guessing whether, when it starts again, it will go forward or backward? You begin calculating how much of the train has already passed and estimating how much is on the other end and which would be better, quicker—for the train to move forward or backward? The unthinkable crosses your collective fourth-grade mind.

"Should we?"
"No, not yet."
"Now?"
"Yeah. Let's go."

One by one, Philip first. He reaches for the big iron stepladder on the side of the boxcar and hoists himself up. Left foot on the link, right foot on the narrow edge, swing around to the other ladder and jump down. Easy. Fast. He's ready to go home. Cathy next. Hoist up. Left, right, left, and hop down.

Your turn. How can you say no? They're already on the other side. The train, the stupid train, is just sitting there, and they're talking about stopping for an ice cream bar at the store. Pull. Up the ladder. You are weak and soft. They are lean and strong. Step on the big link. You are in a tunnel, a canyon, a dark cave. The cars are huge, bigger than they look from the plumbing supply house. You are on one. You are between two. The smell of oil and grease is sickening. The link is covered with thick black grease, and it is on your new saddle oxfords. There is no air in here, and the darkness and the smell of dirty steel blind you. Down there, under the cars, under your feet, the loose rail is sticking up.

"Come on" is the predictable cry from your friends. Swing over. Jump down. God help us, we did it a couple of times. We climbed between those massive freight cars. And it wasn't because we didn't know any better.

Joanne Womac lives next to the train tracks in a wood-frame shanty not fifty feet from the rumbling trains. She is my best friend in second grade. We are a pair in 1962. My mother calls her and all other little black children "picaninnies." Joanne, with her big, rich smile and her shining black eyes. Me, with my chubby self and long, blond braids. We walk together holding hands for six or eight sheltered months.

One day after school, Joanne and I walk down the tracks to her house. We love to hop on the sticky, black-brown ties between tracks, collecting bits of shiny, black coal that have fallen from the freight cars. We love to put pennies on the tracks and retrieve their flat remains after the trains go by. We laugh and giggle at anything. Two kids on the railroad tracks.

Down the steep railroad bed covered with gravel and coal, we climb from the hot steel tracks to Joanne's front porch, a slab of

At the Esso station, they come from behind. They have me on the run: lions and a wildebeest; wolves and a fawn; predator... prey.

plywood on the dirt outside her front door. I say hello to Joanne's sister. She is sitting on a small, flat piece of wood with wheels attached, looking straight into my round white face. Her legs are long, skinny stubs sticking out straight in front. Her calico dress is tucked underneath where her knees should be.

I am frozen in her sister's black eyes. I see my reflection

there. I think of a lake where my dad takes us fishing, of looking over the side of the boat, my chin on the cold aluminum gunwale, into the shiny, black water. I feel I might drown.

"Joanne," I finally say. "I gotta go on home now." I hear her from what seems like somewhere far away say, "OK, bye."

I race away from Joanne's house and her sister's eyes, through the dirt yards between the railroad-track shanties, onto the hard road, and up my hill to home. There I ask Mom what happened to Joanne's sister's legs. She says she fell between two railroad cars when she was twelve.

In the fourth grade, it is well known who loves whom. "He loves you," we tell each other. Love. Mike and his friend David "love" me. They have loved me for weeks now, and I'm sick of it.

At first I like the attention. Sometimes I laugh at their advances. Now, I try to "ignore them," as my teacher advises. Sometimes grownups just don't get it. I begin to fight back and scream at them to stop. They run around the playground, hitting me as they pass. They pull my pigtails or tap my shoulder. The taps are now grabs. They've started to pick up my skirt as they run past. Love.

I am walking home. Alone. Mike lives on my route home. He and David are following me from school. "Let's get her," Mike yells, and they start the run-by stuff. Their taps are harder taps. Their laughs are louder laughs. Their smiles are mean, wicked, evil. They laugh for each other, at each other. They are so very pleased with themselves. Up the block they run, then double-back to hide and do it again.

At the Esso station, they come from behind. It's time to run. Now is when I wish I could run fast like Cathy — she's fast. I

What did I do to bring this on myself? It must be my fault.

can't last long. Now they're positively giddy. They have me on the run: lions and a wildebeest; wolves and a fawn; predator… prey.

Across Lee Street, past Ashbury church, I am getting tired. Here's a little yard. I'll duck in here, don't know whose yard it is. What do they want with me? This is more than pestering. "Get her," they are yelling over and over to each other. "Get her."

There is a big lilac bush in the tiny side yard, and I duck in behind it. I'm standing with my back turned to the boys, covering my face with my hands, looking out from between my fingers past my reflection in a window. A yellow cat sits watching me from under lace curtains, wondering what I'm doing in her lady's yard. There are spiders on the windowsill. The boys want to kiss me — I'm sure of it — so I'll just stand here and cover my face. "Hello, kitty."

Here they come barreling around the corner of the house. "Get her," says Mike. David is hugging me. Hugging my back. He's got his arms around me. His breath is hot, and it smells putrid, like dead meat in the refrigerator. His skinny body is pressing against my back.

"I got her!!!"

"I got her!!!"

"I got her!!!"

They are running away screaming it: "I got her!!!" The kitty was frightened by the appearance of the boys and jumped away. The lilacs have replaced the smell of David's breath. That was it? That was all? What else can I do but walk home?

Nancy Jane Earnest

Though I don't understand what happened that was so bad, I do know I am scum. Nobody will talk to me, and they have a new name for me: "Scuzzy." They made it up just for me. David says we "did it." He's telling everyone, and so is Mike. Did what? I keep asking myself. I look for the kitty in the lace-curtained window. She's not there.

"What's a whore?"

Mom says, "Oh, don't worry about stuff like that. You're too young."

"Hey, Scuzzy!" Philip, John, David, Mike, Cathy, Honey, and the new girl, Terry, call. I'm walking home

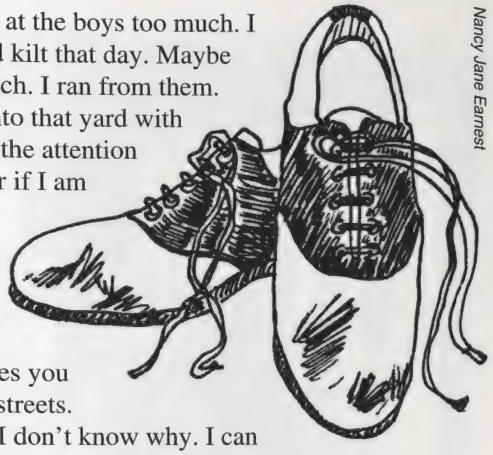
alone. I'm a block ahead, between Choens and the paint store, and they're yelling it, loud. It's echoing in the canyon between the two brick buildings, bouncing down the alley in back. "Oooo Scuz-z-z-z-z-z-y!" My saddle oxfords are looking real interesting since all I can do is bite my lip and look down at them.

The new girl, Terry, thinks this is hilarious. She is short and petite. I have been the second-biggest-in-the-class since first grade. No one has ever called me petite. I am "big-boned." Terry has perfect brown hair that turns up on the ends in a perfect curl, just like my Midge doll's hair. I keep Midge and her best friend, Barbie, in a little suitcase with a clear plastic tube over her head to maintain that perfect curl. I'm wondering if Terry goes home, climbs into a little suitcase, and puts a plastic tube over her head to maintain her perfect curl. She is happy with my plight, working the way only girls work against each other.

Cool kids have power. They rule the playground, the halls, the shoes you wear, the clothes you like. They rule the streets. They hate me, and I don't know why.

David and Mike are heroes, at least among the boys. "Wow, you got her?" the boys ask Mike. "Yeah, we got her," he says, looking over at his partner. This is elementary school torture. My mom says, "Just hold your head up high and keep walking." And I do. I walk to school, home for lunch, back to school, and home again. Alone.

What did I do to bring this on myself? It must be my fault. I smiled and laughed at the boys too much. I wore my navy plaid kilt that day. Maybe they liked it too much. I ran from them. Did I invite them into that yard with me? Had I enjoyed the attention too much? I wonder if I am a bad girl.



Nancy Jane Earnest

Cool kids have power. They rule the playground, the halls, the shoes you wear, the clothes you like. They rule the streets. They hate me, and I don't know why. I can see it in their faces. I can feel it growing in my own heart. Love. Hate.

It is summer. My *reputation* is slowly disappearing. Some of my friends are starting to speak to me again, probably because there's just the five of us up here. Our hillside neighborhood is small. We build forts in the woods, climb on the rocks behind Cathy's house, make Kool-Aid popsicles, and sometimes walk down to the store for an ice cream bar. David and Mike live far away, and I don't have to see them. I wonder about the kitty in the lace-covered window sometimes. I'm leaving for Girl Scout camp in a week, and when I get back, school starts. Mom and I will go shopping for new school shoes. I suppose, on the first day of school, we'll walk. N&T

Martha Wolfe now lives in the northern Shenandoah Valley with her husband and three teen-age boys. She grew up in Charleston, W.Va., a big little town on a river. Her children ride the bus. They have never walked to school in their lives.

Zenith July

The morning heat is silvery, its veil over everything
when she phones her mother who, for a long time, has been ill. "Iced tea,"

her mother says immediately, as if impatient and waiting all morning
for this one call. "July the Fourth, the only day of the year we had

iced tea. Because early in the day, along with our daddy, we
hitched up the mule and rode into town to buy that icy block."

As they talk she notices: The three crepe myrtle heavy
with their red. Each limb bent, under its own weight, to kiss

the lawn. Leaves, one overlapping another, darkest green
and wing-like. Thirty, or forty, maybe fifty Japanese beetles,

in the trees' orbit. And still on her mother's fingertips
the sweat beads from a cold glass.

—Lou Green

Lou Green is an artist and poet. She lectures, most recently at Davidson College in Davidson, N.C., on issues of race in a small Southern town.

The Cage

by Les Brown

Boy and chimp square off in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

A tandem truck with latches and hinges on the sides of its cargo bed appeared beside the road at Otis Lonon's General Store one early fall afternoon in North Cove, a North Carolina Blue Ridge farm community nestled between Honeycutt and Linville mountains. On it was written, in bold red letters, WALLY'S SIDE SHOWS, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, above and below a cartoonish drawing of a grinning gorilla lying on his back.

A medicine man-style traveler stood on a platform beside the dilapidated truck, luring the boys of North Cove with his booming, friendly voice. I watched as he dropped the sides of the truck, revealing a large 8-by-15 foot cage. Inside, a chimpanzee about the size of a stocky eight-year-old kid was still crouched in one corner on the sawdust-covered floor; only his eyes shifted from boy to boy, all standing back from the platform.

"Now all of you stout boys come on 'round here, up close," said the red-faced man, who looked a little like the ape in the cage.

"See my buddy here?" he asked, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. "Ain't he cute? He likes to rassle. We're traveling through here between shows, and I needed to stop and let him rest and play a little bit before we get on our way."

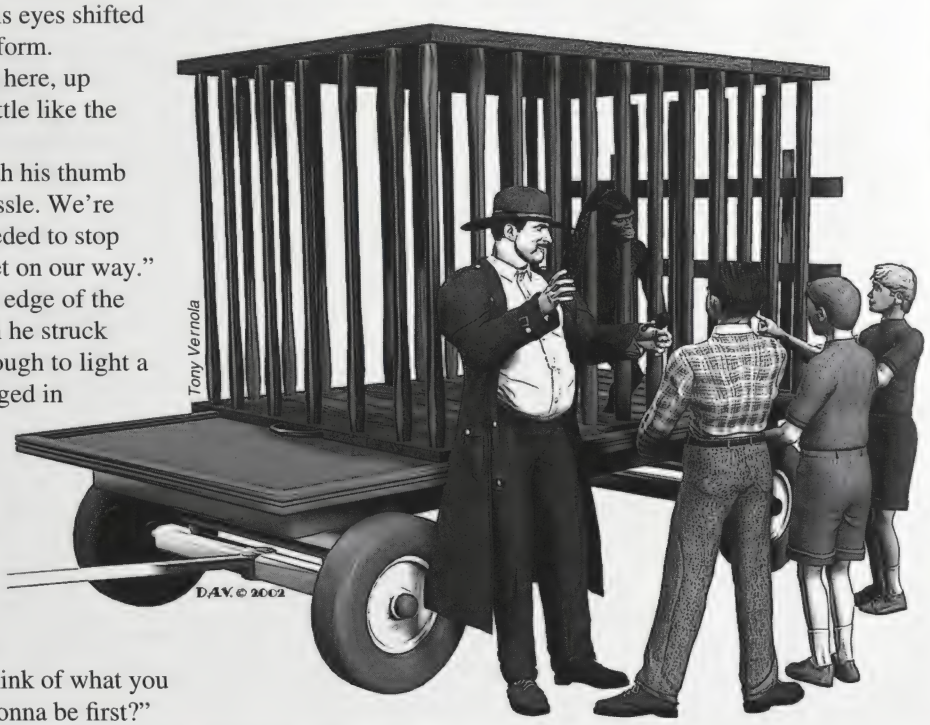
He paused, eased himself down to sit on the edge of the platform, and cupped his hands around a match he struck with his stained thumbnail. He paused long enough to light a Camel that he had tapped from its pack. It wagged in his lips as he continued.

"You know what I'm gonna do? I'll let you boys in the cage to rassle him for a dollar. If you can pin him in three minutes, I'll give you five dollars back. Look at him: He's a little feller, and you big old farm boys can have some fun with him—earn you a little cash, too. How about it? I bet they ain't none of you who's ever rassled a chimpanzee before. Just think of what you can tell everbody at school tomorrow. Who's gonna be first?"

He pointed at Roy Holyfield, a small boy of my age, and snapped his head toward the cage. "Come on, boy. A young feller like you's a lot bigger'n my chimp. Why don't you go first?"

Roy gained his confidence and stepped forward. He paid the man his dollar and climbed the makeshift steps to the cage door.

The man opened the door, and Roy stepped inside. The chimp stood up on his hind legs and watched as Roy moved in. Roy edged closer, and the wary animal suddenly sprang onto the side of the cage with a rasping scream. Roy flinched but again approached. The ape leaped again, this time not stopping until it had made about seven circles around Roy, winding up by hanging by all four limbs from the roof over



Roy's head. Roy reached up and grabbed the chimp's arm but was immediately lifted off the floor and swung to the front end of the cage. When the chimp let out a loud growling sound and bared his teeth through his muzzle, Roy backed toward the door.

"I ain't messin' with that little turd anymore," Roy said. The man opened the cage door, and Roy stepped out, shaking his head in frustration.

"He's a little tense from all of the riding, and he needed to let off a little steam. Come over here, Bungo!" the man said. The chimp let go of the roof of the cage and bounced to the man, who handed a banana through the bars from a wrinkled paper bag beside him. "Now, Bungo, these boys are nice. They just want to play with you. You behave." The chimp walked to the back corner and attentively peeled and ate the banana sideways.

Sensing my opportunity for glory after Roy's failure, I could not let the chance pass. Neither could I resist the temptation to be able to say that I had wrestled a real chimpanzee. Maybe Wanda Swofford would be impressed. So I paid my dollar and climbed into the cage.

I had been carefully watching the man's method of controlling the animal. My strategy was to act like a friend and gain the chimp's trust. Talking gently, I eased toward the little ape and reached out slowly for his long, black fingers. His head was turned away, but he was watching me out of the corner of his dark, round eyes. My fingers gently touched his.

He let out a blood-curdling scream and took the same seven laps around the cage, settling on the floor at the far end. I rushed him, grabbing at him with both arms. Nothing was there. He had moved so quickly that I missed him completely. I attacked again but stopped cold when he slammed his fist against the metal of the front of the cage so hard that the whole truck shook. Reason took hold as I realized that this animal was much stronger than he seemed. I abandoned the project — and part of my faith in psychology.

Sensing my opportunity for glory after Roy's failure, I could not let the chance pass. Neither could I resist the temptation to be able to say that I had wrestled a real chimpanzee. Maybe Wanda Swofford would be impressed. So I paid my dollar and climbed into the cage.

Stan Holtzclaw was a big athletic boy, the best on the North Cove basketball team. The man eyed Stan and said, "Them boys just ain't got it. I bet you ain't got it either, big feller." Nobody ever said anything like that to Stan.

The blond and good-looking railroader's son slipped the white T-shirt off his muscular frame, threw it on the ground, and stepped forward. The muscles in his back rippled as he pulled himself up onto the platform without using the steps. Stan turned to face those of us who hated him for his athletic prowess, flexed his biceps, and turned back to face the chimp. He ducked his head to get through the cage door and surveyed the battlefield.

In contrast to my approach, Stan would naturally assert dominance over his small, furry ancestor. Bungo had perched himself on a triangular wooden platform in one corner of the cage about four feet off of the floor. Stan lunged at the chimp, grabbing his right hand. He pulled. Bungo screamed, jerked free, and placed one foot squarely on top of Stan's head on his way to the usual seven circles of the cage before settling right back on the platform. Stan, a little drunk from following the blur around and around the cage, lunged again. Bungo's long arms grabbed the top cage bars as he swung both feet into Stan's sweaty, muscular chest, knocking him to a sitting position in the sawdust.

After a minute or two of being bounced around the cage every time he touched the chimp, Stan finally knew the feeling of defeat. As he left the cage, this time not having to duck to get through the door, Bungo curled his lips into a grin and hurled a handful of crap through the bars at us.

The man took our money, folded up his truck, and drove away. N&T

Les Brown grew up in North Cove in the mountains of North Carolina. He is currently a professor of biology at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, N.C. He has been published in Appalachian Heritage, Journal of Appalachian Studies, *and* Appalachian Journal.

My Buddy NUB

by Deana Steiner Smith

Good company and sweet berries are the earmarks of a friendship in the West Virginia mountains.

I hear a four-wheeler coming down my driveway. Looking out my window, I see my buddy Nub driving in with a one-gallon ice cream bucket held in place with bungee cords on the front of his red four-wheeler.

Well, I guess I know what I'm about to do. I holler at him to give me a minute. I quickly change my clothes to long sleeves and pants and retrieve the ice cream bucket Nub had given me last year. We're going berry pickin'.

I wave my hand in greeting, add my bucket to his, and hop on the pillow placed on the luggage rack on the back of the ATV, also held in place with bungee cords. I get comfortable, and we're off down the road. We pass the other two houses on this dirt road and then travel for another two-and-a-half miles to get to

Deana Steiner Smith

Nub and Lady

Deana Steiner Smith

Nub picks raspberries.

I wave my hand in greeting, add my bucket to his, and hop on the pillow placed on the luggage rack on the back of the ATV.

the berry patch. The drive is peaceful; we leave the everyday workday behind. We ford Buttonwood Creek and then another unnamed tributary of the Little Kanawha River headwaters. It's a hot summer day, but with the shade of umbrella magnolia, birch, oak, maple, locust, and a host of other hardwood and softwood trees, their leaves waving slightly in the cool breeze from the river, it is tolerable in long sleeves and pants.

It was a very wet and chilly spring, so the raspberries aren't as plentiful as in past years. There are two huge berry patches on this stretch of the river road, and we decide to choose the furthest one. As we scope the wild raspberries, it is obvious someone has beaten us to it. That's the way it is: Either your timing is good, or it ain't. We start picking, knowing that the harvest will be slim, but there is sure to be enough for both of us to make a cobbler.

It is obvious someone has beaten us to it. That's the way it is: Either your timing is good, or it ain't.

Deana Steiner Smith

Three of Nub's grandchildren — Miranda Chidester, Jamie Fincaer, and Dustin Chidester — follow Smith and Nub on a second four-wheeler, outfitted with a berry bucket held on by bungee cords.

Nub's real name is Bland Raikes. He and his family have lived in southern Upshur County, W.Va., for many generations. Although his nickname is Nub, he is 6 feet tall. When Bland was about 10 years old, one of his chores was to shell corn to make grist to grind into meal. He was shelling the nubs of the corn to give to the chickens when his uncle started calling him "Nub." The name stuck.

Through the years, I have listened to many stories of Nub's life. My favorite is of Nub's great-grandmother Susan, who was outside clearing brush one day. Wanting some meat for the dinner table, she sent her sons hunting. As she worked outside, a deer ran past. With her pitchfork in hand, she stabbed the deer. She had it skinned out, butchered, and had some of it on the stove cooking when her sons returned empty-handed. One of the

Deana Steiner Smith

Deana Smith and Nub relax while thinking of raspberry and blackberry cobbler, jam, and fruit smoothies.

Deana Steiner Smith

Nub walks down the road with Lady.

Nub is such good company, even-tempered, with a quick chuckle at the simplest things, the small things in life.

boys turned to the other and said, "If I didn't know better, I'd swear there was deer meat cooking."

Nub will be 86 years old this year. We visit each other two to four times a month, and it is always a treat. He is such good company, even-tempered, with a quick chuckle at the simplest things, the small things in life. I look forward to gathering raspberries and blackberries with him again this summer.

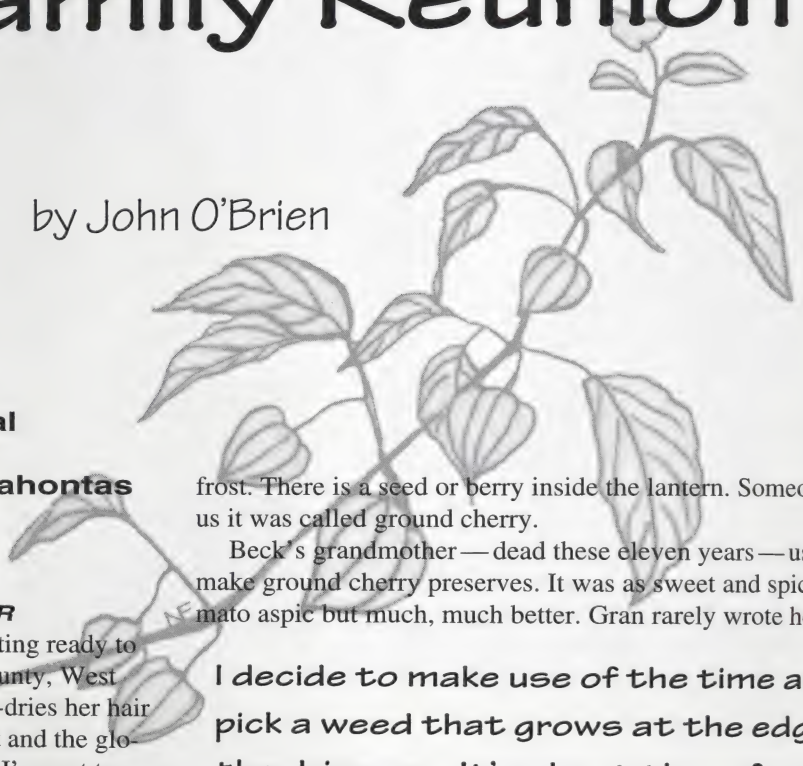
Some years, we have gathered enough berries for just a cobbler, while other years there was enough for cake, freezing, jelly, and fruit smoothies. The evening after this particular expedition, we each made a cobbler — Nub's from Bisquik, mine from scratch. We always trade ample slices of our flavorful cakes for each other to enjoy.

And I know that next winter, as I pull berries from the freezer to eat, inevitably Nub will come to mind, the sweetness of the berries as true as our friendship. N&T

Deana Smith is a freelance photographer based in Rock Cave, W.Va., specializing in documentation of environmental and social issues and rural lifestyle. Her photographs have appeared in various publications, including Outdoor Life, Country Magazine, Woodworkers Journal, USA Today, *and* Fly Rod & Reel.

NOTES from the Pugh Family Reunion

by John O'Brien



Family and food are the essential ingredients of a 50-year-old Pocahontas County, W.Va., ritual.

Getting Becky Through a Door

It's 10 a.m. on an overcast day, and we are getting ready to go to the Pugh Family Reunion in Pocahontas County, West Virginia. *Sunday Morning* is on while Beck blow-dries her hair in the bathroom. On television, it's Claude Monet and the glories of French art as I test one of the deviled eggs I've put together the night before — my small contribution to the reunion feast. I have outdone myself. Passing the bathroom, I tell Beck — shouting over the hairdryer — "These eggs will be the hit of the reunion."

Making a face, she says, "With all that good food, you think eggs will be noticed?"

"These," I tell her, "are not your ordinary deviled eggs. They are to reunion food what Claude Monet is to painting. I expect someone to stand up on the picnic table in the middle of the hubbub and demand a moment of quiet appreciation."

Becky says, "I'm sure," and continues to blow-dry her hair.

Waiting in the Driveway

I've spent 36 percent of my adult life waiting in a car, or near a car, as Becky struggles to get through a door. I decide to make use of the time and pick a weed that grows at the edge of the driveway. It's about three feet high and has yellow flowers that turn into paper-thin pods shaped like Japanese lanterns. Now the lanterns are green but will turn orangey-yellow after the frost. There is a seed or berry inside the lantern. Someone told us it was called ground cherry.

Beck's grandmother — dead these eleven years — used to make ground cherry preserves. It was as sweet and spicy as tomato aspic but much, much better. Gran rarely wrote her recipes down, but if indeed Beck and I have found "ground cherries," we might locate a recipe for the preserves. In this small way, we keep Gran's memory alive.

I decide to make use of the time and pick a weed that grows at the edge of the driveway. It's about three feet high and has yellow flowers that turn into paper-thin pods shaped like Japanese lanterns.

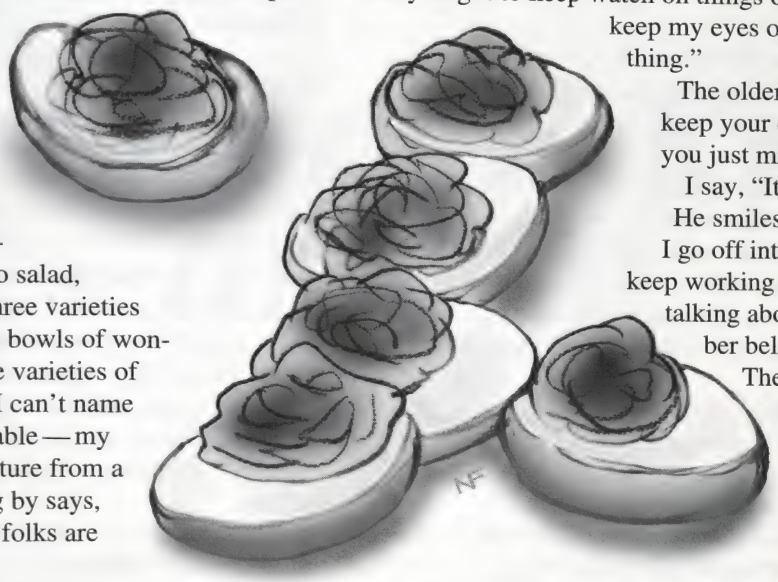
The trouble is my book calls this plant Japanese lantern, but I find no reference to ground cherry. Is Japanese lantern another name for ground cherry? If one of the older women at the Pugh Reunion can identify the plant as ground cherry, we can begin to look for a recipe. I put the plant on the floor of the back seat.

On the Road

Up North Mountain, an overcast day but still lovely. The only color so far — Virginia creeper and sumac — both intense red. Or is that vermilion or scarlet? Everything else is still deep green.

We arrive at Old House Run. It's a little roadside park with

picnic tables and a shelter, grass, and trees, two outhouses, and the run itself. Old House Run is a whisper of water at the edge of the trees, just before the mountain starts up. Lots of cars are parked around. A preacher is just finishing a service in the picnic shelter for fifty or sixty Pughs and their consorts.



Beck puts my astonishing deviled eggs on one of the picnic tables inside the shelter. They do seem insubstantial there among the fried chicken, pork tenderloin, spicy ham, half a dozen casseroles, three different kinds of potato salad, four other plates of deviled eggs, three varieties of rolls, salt-rising bread, two large bowls of wondrous green beans, fruit salad, three varieties of cole slaw, and half a dozen dishes I can't name but intend to sample. The dessert table — my God — each cake and pie like a picture from a gourmet magazine. (A man passing by says, "Makes you wonder what the poor folks are doing.")

The Pugh Family and My Wife's Connection

Mr. Lewis Pugh married a Cherokee Indian lady in the late 1800s. That's why so many Pughs have deep brown eyes. (Maybe yes, maybe no, but it's nice family lore all the same.) Gran — Beck's grandmother and the maker of wondrous ground cherry preserves — her mother was a Pugh. Beck has been coming to reunions at Old House Run for fifty years. For her, the

> "These," I tell her, "are not your ordinary deviled eggs. They are to reunion food what Claude Monet is to painting."

Pugh Reunion is three things. First, the warmth of the Pugh Family. Second, catching crawdads with a waxed paper cup in Old House Run. Most of all, it's butterscotch pies, the best in all the world.

Best Pugh Reunion Advice (This from my father-in-law, Jamie)

"If you don't sit down to eat, nobody can tell how much you're eating. You can keep coming back, and nobody knows."

The Service Ends and the Eatin' Begins

Inside the picnic shelter, an older woman offers the blessing. I refuse to carry on about the food. It's wonderful. I take my plate to a picnic table at some distance from the shelter. It's next to the run. Here on the table, a maple leaf not much bigger than the tip of my thumb is bright red and yellow. It's already high-fall in the bonsai world.

As I start into the second chicken breast, a middle-aged man and his wife and a younger man come up to the table. The older man says, "You looked lonely over here, so we just thought we'd come join you."

"Do," I say, "Please do." Then I add, "I just thought somebody ought to keep watch on things over here. I thought: If I keep my eyes open, I just might see something."

The older man says, "Well, if you keep your eyes open long enough, you just might."

I say, "It's been my lifelong hope."

He smiles at me.

I go off into my own thoughts and keep working on the chicken. They are talking about the underground chamber below White Sulphur Springs. The federal government — it was revealed several years ago — had constructed bunkers up under the mountain for the president and various congressmen in case of nuclear attack. Now that the cold war is over, there seems no need. But there has been talk of turning the underground facility into a gambling casino. Come gamble where the president almost hid out during a war that, thank God, never happened — that sort of appeal.

One man says, "Do you think they'll really do that?"

The older man says, "I don't see why not. I know the fellow that heads up security there. He could maybe help you find work. You could maybe go talk to him."

"I could," the young man says. "I just might."

I'm still back thinking about the underground casino. In my mind, I've got Bob Dole shaking the dice — with his good arm, of course. At the poker table, Honest Willy Clinton, Al "The Gentleman" D'Amato, Newt "Kind Heart" Gingrich, Strom "the Professor" Thurmond, Ted "Temperance" Kennedy, Robert "Old Showboat" Byrd, and Hal "Too Slim" Heflin. I give the odds to Robert Byrd in this game of chance. He has Hoyle memorized.

A yellow dog that resembles a cocker spaniel and several other breeds trots up. It belongs to the dark-haired lady at the other end of the picnic table. It seems like an awfully nice dog, and I can't get over how calm and quiet it is. I tell her, "You've got a nice, calm, quiet dog there."

She says, "Terrific dog."

I say, "I have two Shelties at home."

"They're so pretty," she says.

I say, "But crazy. They're excitable, and they bark all the time."

"Really?" she says. "I've heard that."

I say, "You couldn't use two pretty dogs, could you?"

She says, "I don't think so."

I was only kidding anyway. I love my Shelties. I just wish they weren't so crazy — or maybe that they were quiet about their lunacy.

My plate appears depressingly empty. I say, "My shift's

done. It's your-alls turn to keep an eye on things over here."

The older man waves a fork at me and says, "Don't you worry about a thing. We've got this end covered."

The Star

Cody, who may be three, is the star of the reunion. He has long blond hair and keeps chasing his dad on the grass, tumbling around and laughing. No one has more fun than Cody.

The Old House Run Tradition

The cups are Styrofoam rather than waxed paper now, but after fifty years, the routine is still the same. You finish your first meal, drain your juice, take off your shoes, then hunt crawdads with the empty cup in the run. Teen-age girls forget that they're teen-age girls and hunt with as much enthusiasm as eight-year-old boys.

Female Craftiness

A boy runs up to his mother, who is taking things out of a car. All excited, he shouts, "Mom, Mom, look at what I caught."

Mom peers into the cup and says, "Oh my."

It's exactly what Beck says when I show her a bass or trout that I've caught. Where do women learn these things?

The Quest for Ground Cherries

I go wandering around from table to table, group to group, with my withered plant. Some of the older women kind of, sort of remember it, though no one is quite certain. Mrs. Leta Shears says, "I believe there were two plants that looked very much

I go wandering around from table to table, group to group, with my withered plant.

alike. This one looks like Chinese lantern. Ground cherry is something else, I think." (If the oldest women are no longer quite sure, ground cherry preserves may well be lost.)

Best Exchange

Two older men are walking together by the food table. One man says, "You'd better get you some of that potato salad. My wife made that potato salad."

The second man says, "What kind is it?"

"Kitchen sink."

"How's that?"

"Everything in it, including the kitchen sink."

"That so?"

"Nine hundred things in there."

"Nine hundred?"

"I counted."

"I'd better try some then."

What is Most Missed at the Pugh Reunion

Butterscotch pies, and more than that, the people who made butterscotch pies in the past. There are no butterscotch pies at this reunion, and Beck says there were none last year either.

The Last Good Egg Goes Down

Wandering into the picnic shelter, I notice that only one of my eggs is left. I devour it. No standing ovation or grand announcement, but now I can say, "They all went," which is what all reunion cooks want to say.

Harvey

He is eighty-three and has been taken from the nursing home for the afternoon. I walk into the picnic shelter with my withered plant. Harvey looks at the plant in my hand and says, "What's that?" Then he looks at me as if terrified and tilts his head and says, "What?" again.

Harvey is suffering with age and loss of memory. No one has officially diagnosed Alzheimer's, but who knows about these things? For Harvey, nothing that happens has precedence. Everything — the plant in my hand, me, the reunion — is out of context. He has left the trail and started into the thicket that waits for all of us. In the meantime, there is Cody rolling on the grass and the sweetness of family on an August Sunday.

The Photo Op

Eugene — that's Eu´-gene rather than Eu-gene´ here in the mountains — is the official Pugh Reunion photographer. He looks exactly like the way Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates will look when he reaches seventy. Eugene sets up the camera on its tripod, squints through, and advises us to squeeze together. He sets the camera timer, then sprints to join us while the various Pughs call out encouragement.

"Come on, Eugene. You're gonna miss it."

Eugene tucks into the front rank and kneels as always. The camera makes its zipper sound.

We belong to history. N&T

John O'Brien is the author of the memoir, At Home in the Heart of Appalachia, *winner of the 2001 Weatherford Award. For more information, visit www.johnobrien.org/ or write John O'Brien, PO Box 148, Franklin WV 26807.*

Eggs Claude Monet

Boil up eight eggs and cool them down at once in cold water. Shell eggs. Cut them in half lengthwise with a disturbingly large knife — a trout fillet knife works well here. Remove all yolks. Put yolks in bowl.

Add the following:

- 12 finely chopped black olives
- 1/2 tsp. Old Bay seasoning
- 1 tbsp. mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp. sour cream
- 1 tsp. golden spicy mustard
- 6-10 drops Tabasco sauce
- salt & pepper to taste

Mash the mixture up with a fork. Stuff back into egg whites. Enjoy.

A novelist describes how he uses fiction to try to recreate his family's lost past.

What I Don't Know —and Do

by Silas House

Growing up, I was always told that my great-grandmother was full-blooded Cherokee. I admit this with some hesitation, as it now seems the fashionable thing to claim Native American blood. Due to doctored censuses, misremembered memories, and burned-down courthouses containing birth certificates, I cannot be sure if I am one-eighth Cherokee. I have no legal proof of it, at least.

But the older people in my family remember my great-grandmother Martha clearly. They say she had black hair that fell to the backs of her legs, black eyes that caught you in her gaze and didn't let go. Her laugh was guttural, never held back. She could dance, she was a good hand to raise a garden, and she "worked like a man" from daylight to dark. And she was Cherokee, no doubt about it, although this was something she didn't talk about much. Martha's parents raised her up to act more like a white person than a Cherokee, and some people said they were Melungeons.

What happened to my great-grandmother is symbolic of what was taken from the Cherokee people when federal troops escorted some 17,000 Cherokee on a forced march from Southern Appalachia to the newly established Indian territory in Oklahoma during the Removal in 1838. (Many Cherokee people don't refer to the Removal as the Trail of Tears because they imagine their ancestors walking proudly, not shivering with tears.) Although Martha would have been a baby in the late 1880s, fifty years after the Removal, it still haunted her people. It caused them not to teach her the old ways, not to give her a full look at her heritage. In short, her ancestry and culture were taken from her.

Still, this is only what I have been told, and most of this is assumption on the part of my family. Being from the South — and even more specifically, from Appalachia — one of the first things a person asks is "Who are your people?" It pains me that I don't really know.

When I set out to write *A Parchment of Leaves,* my second novel, I naively thought I could simply create a life story for my great-grandmother. I reasoned that since I didn't know much about her, I'd just make up a heritage for myself. And I thought it might help me in my search to find out more about Martha Sizemore. The only physical evidence left of her existence are the children she bore, a jagged rock marking her grave on a Leslie County, Kentucky, mountain, and a diary — my most prized possession — that she kept from 1937 until her death in 1950. Instead of intimate observations, however, the little book is filled with short notes, such as "My daughter is in love with a boy she can't never have" or "Today is 4th March, 1941 and it is cold. Me and Bonnie are setting by the fire, piecing a quilt. We are about to freeze to death." There are poems: "Remember me early/Remember me late/Remember the night/We kissed at the gate." And since Martha was a frugal woman who eventually founded the county's farmers' cooperative, there are pages of figures such as these, "Flour: $2.10, Vinegar: 20 cents, sugar 58 cents, writing tablet 15 cents."

When I told people I was writing a book about a Cherokee woman in the early 1900s, they instantly had expectations; they thought of feathered headdresses and peace pipes and teepees, which Cherokees never even lived in. They expected a noble character who has infinite wisdom. Of course, these stereotypes are just as absurd as those that portray Native Americans as savages who enjoyed nothing more than a good murder.

Those assumptions drove home the fact that something very real was lost during the Removal. The past must have been a ghost that walked alongside my great-grandmother and her people. In honor of that, I brushed aside any real agenda to portray Cherokee life. Instead, I wanted to present a character who is molded by her heritage without actually knowing what it was. And to be quite honest, I wanted to write the book so I could have a strong, extraordinary great-grandmother to call my own, maybe to even run off that ghost of unknowing that my family still lives with. Naturally, the novel took over, and things hap-

pened that I would have never wished upon Martha, but when all was said and done, I realized that though I still did not know my great-grandmother, I did have a sense of who I was. Most important, I had a sense of what had been taken from me all those years ago when my people refused to be marched out of North Carolina by Andrew Jackson's army. Instead, they took to the mountains and worked their way up to settle finally on Rockhouse Creek in Eastern Kentucky. Even today, we cannot prove our lineage, and no one in my contemporary family is on the Cherokee rolls. No matter what, however, those ancestors live in me and my siblings, my cousins, our children. And that's something that no one can take away. N&T

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Silas House's first novel, Clay's Quilt, *published by Algonquin Books in 2001, won the Bronze Book of the Year award from* ForeWord *magazine. The book has also been nominated for the Southeastern Bookseller's Book of the Year, the Appalachian Writers Association's Appalachian Book of the Year, and other prizes. House lives in Lily, Ky., with his wife, Teresa, and two daughters. He is at work on his third novel, a prequel to* Clay's Quilt *entitled* Anneth and Easter.

FICTION

Silas House's new novel, A Parchment of Leaves, *is told in the first-person voice of Vine, a young Cherokee woman who marries an Irishman named Saul Sullivan. In 1914, she leaves behind her people at Redbud Camp and moves with Saul to God's Creek, where his family welcomes her with open arms. But all is not as it seems. Soon Vine finds herself in a perilous triangle of love and betrayal. In the following scene, Vine spends the morning of her wedding listening to an old tale from her mother.* A Parchment of Leaves *(named for a line of poetry by James Still) will be published in the fall of 2002 by Algonquin Books.*

Excerpt from:

A Parchment of Leaves

by Silas House

It was a ritual between us that every morning my mother would comb out my hair. Sometimes — when I was very lucky — she would tell me about the people who had lived long before us. On the morning I was to be married, I realized it might be the last time she would run the narrow teeth of that comb down the length of my hair, the last time she would speak to me in the same manner.

She roused me from sleep very early that morning. The world was still dark when I got up, and it was such a quiet morning that it made you want to whisper so that you didn't break the stillness. It was black as the ace of spades and it seemed everyone, everything, was asleep except us two. There was not even a cricket or katydid stirring. The moon looked like melted iron. She led me out onto the porch, where two cups of coffee set on the table. The coffee was bitter — the way she liked it — but I choked it down gratefully. I was afraid I might forget the taste of her coffee once I moved to God's Creek. I swirled it round in my mouth so that it soaked into my teeth. I thought I might be able to pull back this taste someday and remember the way she looked so early in the morning. Mama looked exactly the same when she got up as she had when she laid down. Her eyes were not swelled by sleep, hair barely out of place, never the crease of pillow on her cheek.

"We'll set out here so we don't wake up your daddy," she whispered, and then I knowed that she was going to tell me one of the old tales. Daddy frowned on living in the past.

Even the creek seemed to be trying to silence itself. I imagined that it had growed to a trickle through the night and only when daylight spread itself out would it rush out of the mountain again, tearing through the leaves of ferns on the bank.

"I should have let you sleep," she said. "This will be a tiresome day for you."

"I'm glad you got me up," I said, and I was. The air smelled so warm and juicy that the threat of autumn seemed an impossible thing.

"I'm being selfish," she said, and blowed a line of breath across the top of her coffee. She supped from it with caution. "I want a little time with you to myself before all your aunts and girl-cousins land on us like a pack of crows. They'll want to be in on getting you ready for the wedding."

Mama got up and pulled the comb out of her apron pocket. If I hadn't knowed better, I might have thought she slept with that apron tied about her waist. I could not remember ever seeing her without it.

I was afraid I might forget the taste of her coffee once I moved to God's Creek. I swirled it round in my mouth so that it soaked into my teeth. I thought I might be able to pull back this taste someday and remember the way she looked so early in the morning.

"I thought I might comb your hair out good," she said, like it was not a strange thing to do this early in the morning.

She hustled around behind my chair and ran her small, thick hand down my plait. "You're blessed with such a head of hair," she said. Then I felt her take the yarn from the plait's end and start to unbraid it very slowly.

I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. Mama was careful to stop and work her way through the tangles. She knowed how to fool with hair. She could fashion a three-foot long plait or wind up a bun in a matter of minutes.

"When your great-grandmother died, her man made them cut off a foot of her hair and wrap it up in the funeral net for him," she said. I sat up a little more straight, alert at hearing this story once again. It was never old to me; it was like a song that you never tire of hearing. "A foot never made much difference, since her hair struck the back of her knees, anyway.

"He loved her like air, they said. He loved Lucinda the way most women love their men. You know that he saved her life, don't you? They was meant to be together, if anybody ever was."

I was silent. There was no need to say anything. She didn't need me to prod the story along. I kept my eyes closed and pictured my people. There were no photographs, but I had always carried a picture of them in my mind.

"Lucinda was just a little child when they was ordered out of their homeland. Her people wasn't about to go, though. For all they knowed, they was being marched off to a death camp. No sir, they run off. They scratched out refuge in them mountains. Roaming, never staying no place long. They hid. Sometimes below them they'd see the soldiers, see lines of people being marched out. From high cliffs, they seen boatloads being took up the river. They could pick out the faces of people they knowed."

She whispered, leaning close to my ear as she worked through a rat's nest of tangles.

"They hid for years. They'd run up on people who told them that the army had moved, that the government was tired of looking. Lucinda was getting to be a big girl, about eight year old, I believe. Her people had lived a little while on a big, wild mountain, had built them a good cabin and made friends with some white people they trusted. They didn't dare to go back home, but they felt safe there on the mountain. They got to where they'd let Lucinda roam some."

"And she was out picking blackberries, wasn't she?" I said.

"Out picking blackberries. High summer, the sun a white ball straight over her head. The woods full of birdcall, so loud that she couldn't hear anything but. A creek close by, falling hard on big rocks. Her basket was full."

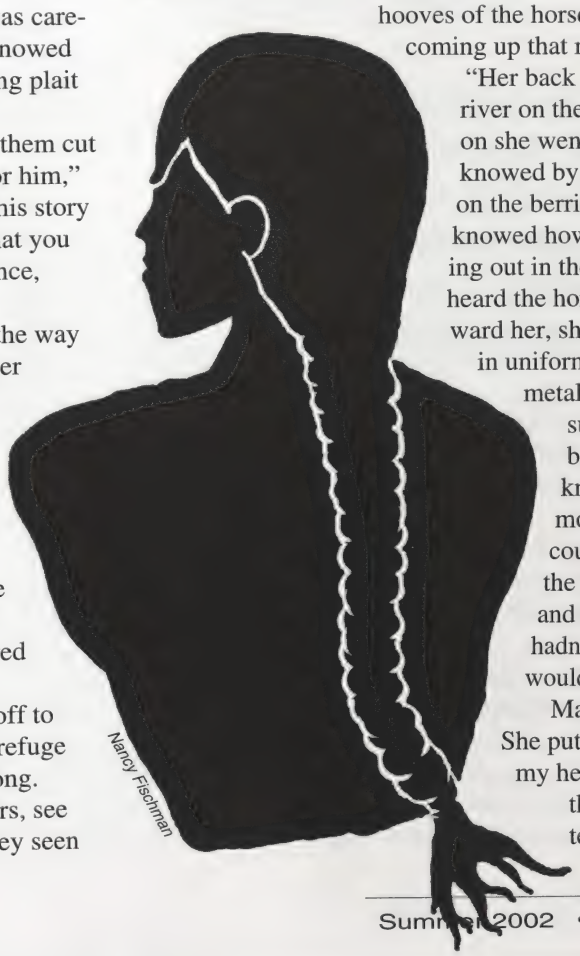
I could see Lucinda. Against the black that was the inside of my eyelids, I seen it all: her little dress, her fingers scratched by briars, the beads of sweat standing on her forehead.

"She didn't know how close she was to the road, paid no attention to the cloud of dust rising over the trees. She moved on down the mountainside, followed the thicket, so heavy with berries that she had to bend low where the vines was near touching the ground."

The comb slid through more freely now that she had rid my hair of knots. She went faster, and even though she did not raise her voice, she talked quicker, her words matching the hooves of the horses that I knowed were coming up that road toward Lucinda.

"Her back was to the road, the river on the other side of it. And on she went. She should have knowed by the white dust that was on the berries. Should have knowed how close she was to being out in the road. By the time she heard the horses coming down toward her, she could see them. Men in uniforms, blue they was. The metal on their rifles caught sun, and she dropped the basket of berries. She knowed right then to move, to run, but she couldn't. She looked at the first horseman's face, and she could tell that he hadn't seen her, but he would."

Mama stopped combing. She put both her hands atop my head, like she was feeling the shape of my skull, testing it the way she


Nancy Fischman

did melons when their bottoms had lost their yellow and they were ready for picking.

"Then an arm come through the trees, and she seen it try to find something to take hold of. All he could catch was her braid, and he pulled her up like a man taking hold of a snake's tail. She flew up and the tree limbs tore across her face. She landed on top of him and they both fell into the tangles of brush. She laid there on him, her back to his chest. His big hand come around to cap over her mouth.

"The soldiers went on. None the wiser."

"And that was him, wasn't it?" I said.

"Your great-granddaddy, hiding out in that same mountain with his people. Eight year later, he married her."

It was here that Mama always stopped speaking. She could never go on beyond this point without prodding.

"Can you remember them?" I asked.

"Lord, no," she said, and laid the comb on the table. She set down and took her coffee back in hand, although I knowed it had to be ice-cold by this time. "They was long dead before I come along. But right after they married, they left that mountain and come here, to Redbud. And that's how we ended up here."

I had a quick revelation and couldn't understand why I had not thought of this before. I realized that she must have had the hair all along, and this morning she would give it to me. It was to be my wedding present.

"Do you have the hair?"

Mama smiled. It was not often that she let her teeth show. She fished down into her apron pocket, a square of cloth that had held so many things in my own lifetime, and brought out a net with the ball of hair inside. It looked like silk curled up there, like a great round wad of night sky. She held it on her flat palm, balancing it like it was something that she wanted to know the weight of.

I leaned my head back and closed my eyes. Mama was careful to stop and work her way through the tangles. She knowed how to fool with hair. She could fashion a three-foot long plait or wind up a bun in a matter of minutes.

"He figured, see, that since this was the part at the very end of her hair that it was the same hunk he had grabbed hold of all them years before. He wanted that piece of her hair to keep."

Mama put the net into my hands. It was heavy and cool, like black water made solid in my hand. I brought it up to my nose and breathed in its scent. It smelled of the cedar chest Mama had kept it in all these years, but I imagined that maybe this was the scent Lucinda had had about her, too. Maybe she had smelled just as musky and sweet. I pictured the two of them, my great-grandparents, as they rode over the mountains up into Kentucky, where they settled. I imagined that all of the cedars they passed through on that journey planted this smell on their skin so thickly that they had never been able to wash it away.

Against the black that was the inside of my eyelids, I seen it all: her little dress, her fingers scratched by briars, the beads of sweat standing on her forehead.

So my ancestors would accompany me on my wedding day. Lucinda — the one person I longed to know above all others — would be near as I married Saul. I kept this scent with me the rest of the day. N&T

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Birthday

My daughter pulls herself through water,
her arms flexible oars, her legs shapely paddles.
I watch her through the many windows
dividing the door from outside. In the kitchen
I mother. I wife. I wait for transportation.
I mix things. When I step outdoors the air is fat
with summer. It lays eggs of sweat on my face
while breezes dusk my elbows, tease my arms
and legs out of time. I'm six. I'm twelve. I'm
seventeen and in the white fever of want,
the body's African interior, blazing,
mysterious. She's eighteen and I'm turning
fifty-two today. My arms freckle. My legs show
patchy maps — blue highways petering
into rural roads. Those side ones where
we used to park. Inside me, silence,
a quiet chamber. The roar of memory
against its slick, reflective and sand-polished
shell. Things gather, are gathered, and gather
dust, making shafts of sunlight visible.
When she leaves the water, all bright wet
and flashing skin, when she
lays an arm across my shoulder, I know
I never lived in that beauty, never
possessed what held me so lightly
at eighteen and let me go.

— Leatha Kendrick

Leatha Kendrick's first book, Heart Cake, *was published by Sow's Ear Press in 2000. She has had poems published in many periodicals and anthologies, including* Writing Who We Are — Poems by Kentucky Feminists *(Western Kentucky University Press, 1999),* Intimate Kisses: The Poetry of Sexual Pleasure *(edited by Wendy Maltz, 2001), and* Spud Songs *(Helicon Nine Editions, 1998). Her poem "Mammography" won the Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Prize in 2001. Kendrick teaches creative writing at the University of Kentucky.*

Home and Beyond: An Anthology of Kentucky Short Stories

edited by Morris Allen Grubbs

The University Press of Kentucky
Lexington, Ky. - 2001
$38.00 (hardcover)

In a poem from U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins' book *Picnic, Lightning,* he writes: "I have never been fishing on the Susquehanna/Or on any river for that matter/to be perfectly honest." Still, he muses:

> There is little doubt
> that others have been fishing
> on the Susquehanna,
>
> rowing upstream in a wooden boat,
> sliding the oars under water
> then raising them to drip in light.

The poet explains that "one afternoon in Philadelphia," he saw just such a scene in an art museum, along with numerous other scenes, that transported him to other places and states of mind.

Reading Morris Allen Grubbs' inclusive, satisfying anthology of Kentucky short stories, *Home and Beyond,* one thinks of the Keatsian theme of Collins' poem, that art provides metaphors for all seekers of essential truth, essential beauty. Indeed, the reader of Grubbs' selections need not be a native of Kentucky, or the South for that matter, to gain insights from the stories represented within it.

Casting among the depths of these varied selections, you are struck by the strength of the 40 writers who, during the past 60-plus years, have been significant contributors to a remarkable range of state and regional literature while establishing themselves on national and international fronts as well. Arranged chronologically into three sections, the book portrays how the connections between these writers and their home state have changed as society has increased in complexity. In addition, Wade Hall's authoritative introduction and an equally edifying afterword by Eastern Kentucky native Charles E. May embellish the anthology.

Beginning with Robert Penn Warren's powerful "Blackberry Winter," the story of a Southern boy's epiphanic initiation into some harsh truths of the adult world, and ending with Crystal E. Wilkinson's striking, intense "Humming Back Yesterday," an uncompromising look at the effects of an African American woman's memories of a premature immersion into adulthood, Grubbs' volume offers fresh samplings from literary artists such as Ed McClanahan, Jane Stuart, Bobbie Ann Mason, Leon V. Driskell, Mary Ann Taylor-Hall, James Baker Hall, Sena Jeter Naslund, Barbara Kingsolver, Lisa Koger, Gayl Jones, Wendell Berry, Guy Davenport, and Robert Hazel. Yet beyond all that, a number of stories in the collection reflect the evolution of Appalachian letters into a recognized literary canon.

Should anyone not yet doused in the literature of our mountain region ever wonder why James Still is known as "the Dean of Appalachian Writers," a reading of his seminal "The Nest" should remove all doubt. Little Nezzie Hargis's struggle around a snowy mountainside, in subzero weather, toward the safety of her relatives' homeplace is sensitively, lyrically rendered: "She felt no pain, only languor and thirst. The gap was three panels distant and she hobbled toward it. She fell. Lying on the ground she crammed snow in her mouth… ."

In addition to Still's master story, Grubbs has added several other Appalachian pieces to flavor his book. From the 1945-60 section comes Dean Cadle's "Anthem of Locusts," a story of a young man's ultimately futile effort to reconcile himself to the tight religious strictures of his love interest. Similarly, in Jesse Stuart's "Lost Land of Youth," Bert Hoskins, having recently become a widower, travels to Lost Creek, home of his earliest love, whom he has never forgotten and to whom he fully intends to propose marriage. Once there, he faces a difficult truth: "He could see bright death all around him, in the vegetation on the earth and in the people he knew in his youth when they were all younger and knew each other by name… he knew it was a dead and dying world unless he recognized Mollie."

The 1960-80 section directs the reader closer toward the hill people's efforts to deal with the world beyond their homeland, a world that is often invasive, as in Hollis Summer's "The Vireo's Nest." He satirizes a contingency of outsiders at an isolated writer's retreat who are unknowingly plagued by their own pretensions, as well as by their misconceptions about the inner and outer world of the mountains.

Jim Wayne Miller's "The Taste of Ironwater" is a definitive, poetic story of the alienation felt by those who, facing hard times during the post-World War II period, left their mountains for the industrial, heavily populated Midwest. Kentuckian Buddy Ratliff, floating aimlessly in Columbus, Ohio, has lost both his new job, from which he has been fired, and his wife, who has left him. At the end of a stint of bar-drinking and despondency, his vision clarifies itself: "Buddy could see [home] as clear as the grains of sand on the bottom of a stream. And lying there, thinking of home, hating it, loving it, he was so homesick for that place he could taste it, like lying on his stomach at a spring down home, drinking the ironwater with its rusty taste — water that stained coffee cups, dippers, and water buckets."

A haunting piece, Gurney Norman's "Maxine" presents a woman whose weeklong visit to her daughter's in the projects of molten Detroit disillusions her as much as Buddy Ratliff's experience in Columbus does him. Her cousin Wilgus Collier meets her at the bus station in Blaine, Ky., buys her a bottle of Mogen David, drives her home, and puts her to bed, all the while learning of her wistfulness and repressed wish for communion with others and, especially, for love.

Two of Appalachia's youngest and brightest writing stars grace the 1980-2000 section of the anthology: Chris Holbrook and Chris Offutt. In Holbrook's elegiac "The Idea of It," the narrator struggles to find satisfactory work, to make his beloved but unyielding Eastern Kentucky the permanent locus for himself, his uneasy wife, and his young son. Confronted by a shrinking land and equally shrinking job market, he is left thinking about "the cold of winter to come."

In Offutt's wonderfully tough and symbolic "Barred Owl," the narrator's desire to escape his ancestral region leads him to the American West. (The character's effort toward self-escape has previously entailed many long evenings at the local wa-

Reviews

tering hole, called the Pig.) He learns from his strange acquaintance with another transplanted native of his home state that "I missed Kentucky more than the Pig."

The Appalachian writers in this volume are not the only ones whose tales echo a sentiment once expressed by Chris Holbrook's fellow Knott Countian James Still in the video *James Still's River of Earth.* In regard to those Kentuckians who outmigrated to Northern factories during hard times in the mountains, Still observed: "Eventually they came back. . . . They intended to."

In a very real sense, all the authors represented in *Home and Beyond* have, to some extent, returned to their home ground in these stories — stories that, like the trout in the museum painting described by Billy Collins in "Fishing on the Susquehanna in July," spring "right out of the frame."

— Stephen M. Holt

Steve Holt, a native of Greenup County, Ky., teaches at the Ohio University Southern Campus in Ironton. His first book of poetry, Late Mowing, *was published with an introduction by Kathyrn Stripling Byer in fall 2000 by The Jesse Stuart Foundation.*

Letters Home
by Jeff Daniel Marion

Sow's Ear Press
Abingdon, Va. - 2001
$18.00 (hardcover)

When I read poetry, I'm looking for transport — I want to be carried off on the back of images, cradled in the poem's sound, flung around the corner of line breaks like a comet tugged by some distant sun. Jeff Daniel Marion's newest book, *Letters Home,* does it all.

I am set on a tractor seat, plowing a Tennessee hillside with a vision of the wide Pacific unfolding behind me. I am a time traveler, sitting on a summer lawn 50 years gone, seeing again in "Detroit Days: Ticket Stub, 1944," the "red glow/ of cigarettes dot the dark." By the book's end, I've been carried to a Pacific island, I've lived in a basement apartment in the housing developments of 1940s Detroit, I've walked into the closetful of shoes no one can ever fill.

Sow's Ear Press. Photograph by Christine P. Patterson

Though these poems speak of particular characters in a small East Tennessee town, I know these people — the jeweler, the bootlegger, the loafers at the county store, the men playing horseshoes who could be my own uncles, a state away in the rough edge of Kentucky. Marion's *Letters Home* recovers one poet's past, but that recovery mends all our old hurts as well — the unsaid spoken at last. In "Detroit Days: The Gift, 1944," he writes:

> O forgive me, good mother
> and father, as I forgive
> you, our errors of love, these
> gifts we offer in hard times.

Each of the volume's four sections has its treasures. At the heart of the book, a sequence of poems called "Detroit Days" renders the experience of a young boy displaced with his family when his father goes to work for Alcoa during World War II. We see the father's lunch box, the next-door neighbor's tempting magazine, the Philco with its green dial from a four-year-old's eye level, gut level, heart level. Filled with urgency and immediacy, these poems are spoken by a boy old enough to feel what has been lost to him, young enough to imagine the Detroit Tigers, lithe and striped, playing on an Edenic field. A particularly moving sequence, "My Mother Remembers Detroit Days," celebrates the strength, courage, and persistence of the mountain women who raised their children far from home and coped with often hostile surroundings.

> 'I wasn't afraid of anything
> back then,' my mother says, wrings
> her hands, fingers gnarled as old
> roots...

Marion's poetry springs from a sacramental universe. In "Rituals," for instance, an aunt's gnarled hands are "jeweled here/and there with stray sequin-scales," the silence of her frying fish rises like prayer, and the morning milking takes on the aspect of a Rembrandt painting, whose loving attention reveals the ordinary to be lovely and luminous. In the poem "Milking":

> Streaks of orange across the sky
> but beneath the looming cedars
> the yolk of morning has barely
> broken: my blind grandmother squats
> on the stool, bends to the task...
> soon the tune of soothing liquid
> vowels filling, froth rising
> as her fingers squeeze...

With each book, Marion's technique deepens. His limber lyric voice moves across line breaks that double and treble the meaning. These late poems more truly reveal the mind and heart behind them — their metaphors more assured and more unexpected. At the same time, there is a quiet directness about the poems, a lack of pretense. Marion's poems refuse to be more than what they are, knowing that what they are is enough. It is everything.

Once again, Larry Richman and the Sow's Ear Press have given us a book to treasure. Beautifully designed by Jonathan Greene, *Letters Home* is an important addition to the region's literature, a volume worthy of Jeff Daniel Marion's love of beautifully made books.

The painter, Paul Klee, once said that "art does not reproduce the visible; rather art makes visible." These poems, these "letters home," *articulate* a reality most of us never knew — or passed through unseeing. Ah, but we recall it, in that inarticulate spot at our center — all of us remember the Dixie Queen drive-in Marion describes in "She's Solid Gone," "where Warren Ray has just swirled/and looped his one-hundredth cone//of frozen custard," those nights with "the swish of

sweet summer air//flowing like the shoulder-length hair of forever."

—Leatha Kendrick

Leatha Kendrick is a poet, editor, and teacher. Her poem "Mammography" received the Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Prize in 2001. Her collection of poems, Heart Cake, *was published in 2000 by Sow's Ear Press.*

Understanding Fred Chappell
by John Lang
University of South Carolina Press
Columbia, S.C. - 2000
$29.95 (hardcover)

"Fresh wonders clamor for language," writes Ole Fred, central character and consciousness of Fred Chappell's striking book-length poem *Midquest.* Chappell is himself one of those wonders, and *Understanding Fred Chappell,* scholar John Lang's comprehensive study of the author, offers a compelling response to that clamor. This book may not rescue this prolific North Carolina author from relative obscurity among contemporary American writers, but it should.

Lang's thorough and penetrating critical examination of Chappell's diverse work offers abundant evidence that Chappell belongs among the elite of American literature. It seems odd, certainly, that this winner of numerous literary prizes should have been neglected critically for most of his 40-year career. Lang, however, convincingly attributes this oversight to Chappell's innate modesty, his frequent identification as "merely" a regional writer, his pervasive humor and playful employment of popular literary genres, and the protean variety of his achievement.

Chappell is that rare thing: Southern, Appalachian, and profoundly American, a writer who readily transcends literary labels by virtue of his versatility; he has produced novels, short fiction, poetry, and critical essays. And *Understanding Fred Chappell* is that rare work of contemporary literary scholarship: exhaustive, insightful, readable, and humane. With a clarity and humility of purpose and vision true to Chappell's own sensibilities, Lang skillfully surveys the entirety of Chappell's canon, more than 20 volumes in all.

Lang emphasizes the universality of Chappell's themes — themes such as the nature and function of storytelling or the quests for truth and order — and his complex moral vision's universality. "Chappell's imagination remains unbounded by place or time," Lang concludes. And yet, Fred Chappell proudly identifies himself and his work with the South and, indeed, combines two key elements central to the best Southern writing: the agrarian world's folk materials and the scholarly world's wide-ranging allusions.

This duality, which Lang traces in part to Chappell's childhood on a North Carolina mountain farm and to his literary education at Duke University, also derives from archetypal themes that run through human (and Southern) history. Specifically, we inhabit a fallen world, a "stricken world," as Chappell calls it. This world, once an agrarian paradise, may yet be redeemed by human imagination — not by art alone but by patterns of order that also include family, community, philosophy, religion, and spirituality. Thus, writes Lang, "His recognition that humanity inhabits a fallen world is balanced by his belief in the individual's potential for rebirth."

Chappell's frequent juxtaposition of the rural South's oral storytelling traditions with formal literary structures — from Dante to horror, fantasy, and science fiction — illustrates this duality as well. The recognizable literary patterns, both paradigm and parody, are satisfying. But should the wit and stylistic pyrotechnics appear to be mere literary high jinks, Chappell repeatedly insists that the artist build on structures inherent in nature.

In Brief

Black Days, Black Dust: The Memories of an African American Coal Miner by Robert Armstead, as told to S.L. Gardner (Knoxville, Tenn.: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002; $35 hardcover, $15 paper). This memoir, the first published by an African American coal miner, is a story of family, community, and underground mining in Northern West Virginia. Engagingly told, Armstead's narrative is a moving historical document of a life lived as an underground miner. He died of lung cancer in 1998.

Divining by Pauletta Hansel (Boulder, Colo.: WovenWord Press, 2001; $12 paper). Pauletta Hansel's poetry collection was inspired by her work in the feminist workshop called Women Writing for (a) Change in Cincinnati and by her experiences caring for a terminally ill friend in 1996. From Eastern Kentucky, Hansel is co-founder of the Soupbean Poets, a politically active writers group, and the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative.

Given Ground by Ann Pancake (Hanover, N.H.: Middlebury College Press, 2001; $24.95 hardcover). Ann Pancake's debut story collection features the Appalachian mountain country of her childhood. A writing teacher and native of Romney, W.Va., Pancake has been praised in early reviews as yet one more contemporary writer who "gets Appalachia right."

Cogan's Woods by Ron Ellis, with a foreword by Rick Bass (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing, 2001; $21.95 hardcover). A native of Maysville, Ky., Ron Ellis offers a father-son memoir based on their annual hunting trips into Cogan's Woods and the hills above the Ohio River in the early 1960s.

Log Cabin Pioneers: Stories, Songs, & Sayings by Wayne Erbsen (Asheville, N.C.: Native Ground Music, 2001; $12.95 paper) and *Log Cabin Songs* by Wayne Erbsen and Laura Boosinger (Asheville, N.C.: Native Ground Music, 2001; $14.95 CD). This volume combines history, folklore, and authentic photographs for an entertaining look at the log cabin lifestyle in American history. The companion CD includes many of the songs found in the book. Erbsen — an author, musician, and historian — began Native Ground Music in 1972 with the intent of capturing historic American music and folklore in books and recordings.

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Reviews

Literature is not an enclosed world but a living, growing process, an ongoing journey that points to a world of mutability and mortality. In fact, it is the interplay — between concerns of the conscious artist and the questions of common folk; between what Chappell calls in *Midquest* "local clarities" and spiritual mysteries; and between historical figures and fictional characters — that determines the complex structural patterns, narrative voice, and thematic paradoxes of Chappell's work.

Chappell's identification with Appalachia, his home, is also a commitment to a larger community. This commitment is part of Chappell's determination to move Appalachia's people and culture from the isolation of an outsider history and identity into the human and historical mainstream. He wants the world to learn, as he writes in *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You,* "that we were people like other people, wise and foolish, brave and frightened, saintly and unholy and ordinary."

Chappell has characterized himself as a folk artist who examines everyday life and its ever-present moral necessities. "Obviousness may be the richest of literary possibilities, if the truly obvious can be once glimpsed," he contends. And surely it can, as Chappell demonstrates by following spiritual questers who find in the obvious "moments of light" aesthetic and spiritual revelations that transform everyday life and redeem the fallen world. Chappell writes in *More Shapes Than One,* "Everything had been revealed to us and yet. ... After revelation, what then?" That's the question that reverberates in Chappell's world.

And now his work is revealed to us through Lang's own marvelous illuminations. *Understanding Fred Chappell* is a worthy addition to the Understanding Contemporary American Literature series, edited by well-known F. Scott Fitzgerald scholar Matthew Bruccoli. Designed to acquaint the uninitiated reader with the demanding techniques of contemporary writers, these studies are eminently accessible for general readers interested in serious literature.

But *Understanding Fred Chappell* is not a page-turner for the casual reader, nor is it meant to be. It is a carefully researched, documented, and crafted literary study of serious intent, and it deserves careful and critical attention from those devoted to understanding and appreciating *real* literature.

Since much of what passes for literature in Appalachia is, in fact, regional defensiveness and self-consciousness, it is a rare pleasure to read the work of a writer whose Appalachian heritage is not the whole story and the work of a scholar who knows it. Like his subject, Lang, professor of English at Emory & Henry College in Emory, Va., and editor of *The Iron Mountain Review,* transcends regional labels and stances. He has courageously undertaken the task of understanding Fred Chappell without a political agenda or literary framework.

The result is a critical study that actu-

continued from p. 41

The Man Who Created Paradise: A Fable by Gene Logsdon, with photographs by Gregory Spaid and a foreword by Wendell Berry (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001; $20 hardcover). Gene Logsdon, a farmer and writer, first met Wally Spero in Old Salem, Ohio, in 1965. Spero "made farms" from the spoil banks of the strip-mined land in Appalachian Ohio. Logsdon's hopeful prose documents Spero's nearly single-handed efforts that, over 30 years, resulted in reclamation and brought prosperity to one Appalachian community.

Paddling the Tennessee River: A Voyage on Easy Water by Kim Trevathan (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 2001; $17.50 paper). In 1998, Trevathan and his dog, Jasper, canoed the 652 miles of the Tennessee River on a five-week journey. His travel narrative documents the past, present, and future of this river while introducing readers to modern Tennessee River dwellers.

The People of the New River: Oral Histories from the Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga Counties of North Carolina by Leland R. Cooper and Mary Lee Cooper (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2001; $30 paper). As in their 1998 oral history collection, *The Pond Mountain Chronicle,* the Coopers rely on the residents of three North Carolina counties to tell the stories of their lives and work on the New River, said to be one of the world's oldest rivers.

Morehead Memories: True Stories from Eastern Kentucky by Jack D. Ellis (Ashland, Ky.: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2001; $35 hardcover). This entertaining and anecdotal history of Morehead, Ky., Rowan County's seat, is a combination of interviews, documentary sources, and personal memories. Ellis, a native of Morehead, is Morehead State University's retired director of libraries.

Somehow Form a Family: Stories That Are Mostly True by Tony Earley (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 2001; $22.95 hardcover; $13.00 paper). Following the success of his first novel, *Jim the Boy,* Rutherfordton, N.C., native Tony Earley has crafted a collection of personal essays that juxtapose "how he stands with one foot in the rural mountains of his birth and upbringing and the other in the Brady Bunch's split-level." Earley's lucid, graceful prose reminds us of how television has impacted our identities just as much as it did our rural relatives.

Lick Creek by Brad Kessler (New York: Scribner, 2001; $24 hardcover). This vivid debut novel by a seasoned magazine journalist and author of children's books is set in the 1920s in Lick Creek Hollow, a West Virginia coal mining community. The dramatic love story, told in Kessler's poetic prose, also chronicles how electricity transformed rural life.

The Life and Photography of Doris Ulmann by Philip Walker Jacobs (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001; $40 hardcover). Although Jacobs' narrative of Ulmann's life is choked by textbook prose and overwhelmed by footnotes, the book eventually reveals Ulmann's complex biography and arresting photographs, many of which depict Appalachian people and lifestyles from 1916 to her death in 1934.

— Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington is Now & Then's *reviews editor.*

ally informs and enlightens, a practical resource teachers and students can actually use, a valuable sourcebook for any future examination of Chappell's work, from undergraduate research papers to sophisticated scholarly articles. Approaching his subject with intelligence, integrity, affection, and grace, Lang achieves his own redemptive vision.

—Gina Herring

Gina Herring is a professor of English at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky. She frequently reviews the work of Southern writers.

Big Cherry Holler
by Adriana Trigiani

Random House
New York – 2001
$24.95 (hardcover)

Out in Cracker's Neck Holler, snuggled in Appalachian Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, Ave Marie Mulligan and her husband, Jack, are overcome with loss and forced to rethink the principles in which they believe as individuals and as a couple.

Big Cherry Holler, Adriana Trigiani's sequel to her first novel, *Big Stone Gap,* jumps ahead eight years in the life of Ave Marie Mulligan, the protagonist who struggled in the first book with forces both within herself and in her world. Trigiani, who was raised in Big Stone Gap, Va., deftly weaved in the events of the missing years between the first and second books. Each book complements the other yet is capable of standing on its own.

Big Cherry Holler is a tale about love and loss and the immense amount of work marriage requires of partners who make a commitment to its philosophy. Ave and Jack are dealing with devastating issues. Together, they are trying to give their daughter, Etta, a stable life during a time of total personal upheaval. Their son, Joe, has died, and the coal mine where Jack has been employed closes. Between the death of their little boy and his unemployment, Jack confronts in himself feelings of uselessness and, worse, of powerlessness.

Meanwhile, Ave is unable to forget Joe, and she allows herself to sink into a recurring dream in which the boy appears. She had waited so long to become a wife and mother. Was she failing?

Beyond the problems with which they are wrangling at home, there are the tribulations of their friends in Big Stone Gap, including Aunt Alice, who once tried to wrest control of Ave's girlhood home and the family business from her niece, a pharmacy called Mulligan's Mutual.

Trigiani puts life's truths into the mouths of all her characters, but especially Ave. Reading the insights into human nature that the novelist sprinkles throughout the story is like sitting down for a soul-to-soul chat with your closest ally. Readers may find themselves nodding in agreement with Ave in her serious moments and laughing out loud when she or one of her friends offer a dose of humor concerning their plights.

In an ironic twist, the death of Aunt Alice brings Ave to healing realizations about her own life. "As Alice lets go, so do I. I let go of my mistakes, the unattainable standards I have for my husband, my daughter, and myself, and my bitterness toward those who hurt me; mostly, I let go of my pride, which I thought had kept me whole but in reality almost ruined me. I was holding on so tightly to being right, to being perfect. There is only one lesson in all of this: Let go. And when you think you've let go completely, let go again."

Ave and the other people of Big Stone Gap may be characters on the pages of a make-believe story, but the issues they face, the feelings with which they deal, and how they cope with situations mirror

Indoor Plumbing

Plump
White enamel chamber pot

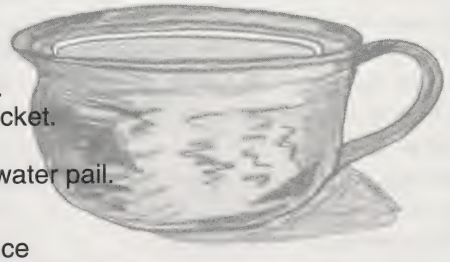
Chipped skin
Rusted scabs
Clattery handle

Embraced by a red ring
For aim?
For decoration?

The essential matching lid
To contain the acrid fumes.

It came with the farm
Like a green stamp.

Bought.
A pot to piss in,
And a window to pitch it out of.
Same day.



It's been ten years.
It's been a wine cooler.
a compost bucket.
a lego bin.
a watercolor water pail.

We've never pissed in it.
Not once
Nor pitched piss
Out any of our windows.

—Dawn Coppock

Dawn Coppock lives on a farm in Strawberry Plains, Tenn. She is a practicing adoption attorney, author of Coppock on Tennessee Adoption Law, *sculptor, and mother of two children.*

life and the characters in ourselves and the world.

Big Cherry Holler is all about coming to terms with self, family, and community in a town that readers will readily recognize as their own.

— Christine Goldbeck

Author of A Tribute to O'Hara and Other Stories, *Christine Goldbeck was recently named editor and publisher of* Anthracite History Journal. *Based in Shenandoah, Pa., she is at work on a novel exploring relationships between mothers and daughters in the Appalachian anthracite region. For more information, visit www.christinegoldbeck.com.*

Archaeology of the Appalachian Highlands

edited by Lynne P. Sullivan and Susan C. Prezzano

University of Tennessee Press
Knoxville, Tenn. - 2001
$55.00 (hardcover)

Archaeologists Lynne P. Sullivan and Susan C. Prezzano have produced a valuable essay collection for those interested in Appalachian archaeology. Sullivan is the curator of archaeology for the McClung Museum at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, while Prezzano is associate professor in the anthropology, geography, and earth science department at Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

There are 24 articles (including the introduction) in *Archaeology of the Appalachian Highlands* written by noted scientists from academia, museums, and consulting firms that are deeply involved in archaeological studies in the Appalachian highlands. The editors divided the book into five parts. The sections explore the physical environment, prehistorical period archaeology, early historical archaeology, and modern archaeological perspectives on Appalachia.

The assemblage of articles by no means covers the entirety of Appalachian archaeology but offers an excellent sampling of archaeological work and interpretation. There is little that ties the articles together, other than the broad heading of each section. This is perhaps the greatest weakness of the work.

Its strengths, however, outweigh the weaknesses. The book's greatest strength is the selection of authors, who are among the most distinguished and respected archaeologists in Eastern North America. The most informative articles are those dealing with the archaeological periods (Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian). These offer samplings that span the geography of the region from the Southern Appalachians to Appalachian New England. Descriptive subjects — such as arts and symbolism, population distributions, architecture, agricultural practices and the variety of cultivated plants, migration patterns, and mortuary practices — are very revealing.

Taken as a whole, the book enables the reader to connect modern Appalachia and its people with the rich prehistorical and early historical human landscapes that have been resurrected through the modern science of archaeology. Part five, "Perspectives on Appalachian Archaeology," offers three articles on Native American highlanders and the trauma of early European contact. The section forms the hinge that helps connect the modern region with its rich native roots.

The introductory article, "The Concept of Appalachian Archaeology," was written by the editors of the book. In this essay, Sullivan and Prezzano do an excellent job of marking the boundaries of the region and providing a concise but revealing description of the physical geography of Appalachia. This sets the stage for the reader to envision the context of each article within the broader context of each part in the book and helps to overcome the weakness of the overall lack of coherence.

The final article, "A Conscious Appalachian Archaeology," also by the editors, attempts to pull together the disparate subjects of the articles. Sullivan and Prezzano focus on the various distinctive features of the region, which can be gleaned from the articles. The themes they emphasize are mostly cultural ones: diversity, marginality, and the persistence of local traditions, which resulted in resistance to change. It might have been helpful if the editors had urged the reader to begin by reading the first and last articles before delving into the variety of concepts and details that make up the body of the book.

Sullivan and Prezzano did not entirely avoid bringing the physical environment into the milieu of culturally distinctive features that have characterized the region. In fact, in the concluding chapter, they cite archaeologist F.G. Fedele from a 1984 *Current Anthropology* article entitled "Toward a Human Ecology of Mountains." There he writes that the mountain "geomorphology is widely considered the most important factor affecting human strategies of land use and the patterning of archaeological remains."

However, the editors do not explore this profound consideration any further than to point out the diversity — in soils, vegetation, drainage patterns, and landforms — that occurs as one moves through the mountains both horizontally and vertically. They also acknowledge the impact of that diversity on Appalachia's economy and, perhaps, culture. It would have been helpful in understanding the scope of Appalachian archaeology if they had attempted to explain why in a physical environment that is basically homogeneous as you travel from north to south, the cultures that existed during each archaeological period adapted so differently. This is, of course, the question that has plagued geographers, anthropologists, and human ecologists since the late 19th century.

All in all, this volume will serve as an important sourcebook for Appalachian and North American archaeology for years to come. This work is not aimed at the casual reader who is unfamiliar with the specialized jargon of archaeology and the sometimes convoluted verbiage of academia. It is meant for the serious student of Appalachian archaeology, and for these folks, the articles are superbly beneficial. Also beneficial is the extensive bibliography that accompanies the text. It is an exhaustive source of some of the most important research in the archaeology of Eastern North America.

— Charles Mayer Dupier Jr.

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BI 327 H02

on Potter's scuppernong wine, on our future
success. We thought he ran
home. Then later, to see a distant
cousin in Wrightsville or Atlantic Beach.

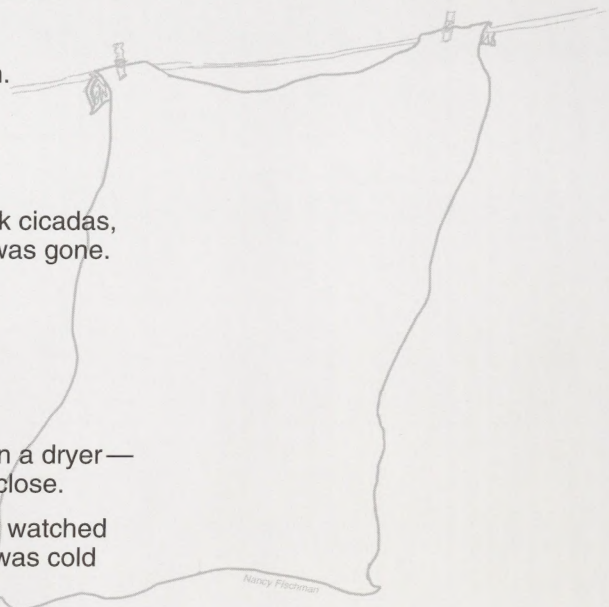
Where's Alton?
Workin' the shrimpers with Gaynelle.

That was the joke of the summer.
The phrase to silence the red and black cicadas,
the bullfrogs by Potter's pond. But he was gone.

You were saying about the sheets?

Like my mother's sheets drying
on the line. White cotton, a touch
wrinkled after a hot iron.
In the summer you bring them in
and they're as warm as if they'd been in a dryer—
a hint of honeysuckle if you hold them close.

One morning, that first winter, I sat and watched
the sheets drying on the line. The day was cold
and clear, the sheets crisp and white
like mountain snow. They fluttered sadly
in the breeze until, without changing at all,
they were frozen bright.



—Terry L. Kennedy

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tion, visit www.christinegoldbeck.com.

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Chuck Dupier recently retired from teaching geography, anthropology, religion, and Appalachian Studies courses at Cumberland College in Williamsburg, Ky. He has written extensively about the geography and anthropology of Appalachia.

Sheets (at a Roadside Diner)

Carla Joy

Sheets, she answers.
That's how it was when he left,
how it felt. Like sheets.

Sheets? I ask.

Well, not at first. We all were drunk
on Potter's scuppernong wine, on our future
success. We thought he ran
home. Then later, to see a distant
cousin in Wrightsville or Atlantic Beach.

Where's Alton?
Workin' the shrimpers with Gaynelle.

That was the joke of the summer.
The phrase to silence the red and black cicadas,
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You were saying about the sheets?

Like my mother's sheets drying
on the line. White cotton, a touch
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In the summer you bring them in
and they're as warm as if they'd been in a dryer—
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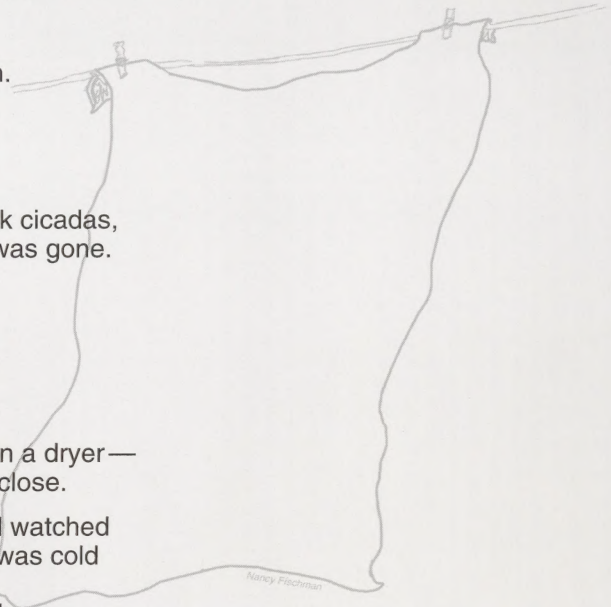

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Terry L. Kennedy is a graduate of the master of fine arts writing program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where he was a Randall Jarrell Scholar. Still a resident of Greensboro, he is slowly renovating a 1930s bungalow in the Historic Oakwood Neighborhood.

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Taryn Lentes

Five Doors, Three Windows
Poet and essayist Cathy Lentes writes against the odds in a room in her 19th-century farmhouse in Appalachian Ohio. Her essay appears on page 9.

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